



PHD

## Negotiating the powers: everyday religion in Ghanaian society

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# **Negotiating the Powers: Everyday Religion in Ghanaian Society**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Bath  
Department of Economics and International Development**

**March 2008**

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# Table of Contents

<b>List of Pictures, Tables and Maps .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>Introduction .....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Religion and Development .....</i>	<i>13</i>
The resurgence of religion.....	13
Views from development .....	15
<i>Summary of Thesis .....</i>	<i>23</i>
<b>Debates around Christianity in Ghana: Approaches to Culture and Modernity</b> <b>.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<i>Introduction .....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Part 1: Christianity in Ghana: Institutional Landscape and Key Debates.....</i>	<i>29</i>
A brief history of Christianity in Ghana.....	29
Categorisation of churches .....	32
Christianity and culture .....	34
Pentecostalism and responses to modernity .....	39
Summary of Part 1 and the question of religion.....	46
<i>Part 2: Negotiating Culture and Modernity in Everyday Life .....</i>	<i>47</i>
Culture and cosmology.....	48
Managing modernity .....	51
Summary of Part 2: Culture and modernity in everyday life .....	56
<i>Conclusion .....</i>	<i>57</i>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<i>Introduction .....</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Part 1: Negotiating the Research Question.....</i>	<i>59</i>
Development of the research question .....	59
Research design.....	61

<b><i>Part 2: Negotiating Data Collection</i></b> .....	<b>62</b>
Site selection .....	62
Overview of methods .....	63
Ethical considerations .....	73
Participant observation and relationships.....	74
<b><i>Part 3: Negotiating Data Analysis and Narrative</i></b> .....	<b>92</b>
<b><i>Conclusion</i></b> .....	<b>96</b>
<b>Ndwumizili: The Village and its Churches</b> .....	<b>98</b>
<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>98</b>
<b><i>Ndwumizili</i></b> .....	<b>99</b>
<b><i>Local Church Context</i></b> .....	<b>108</b>
Overview .....	108
<b><i>The Musama Disco Christo and Assemblies of God Churches</i></b> .....	<b>115</b>
Musama Disco Christo Church .....	116
Assemblies of God Church .....	123
<b><i>Conclusion</i></b> .....	<b>128</b>
<b>A World of Powers: Cosmologies</b> .....	<b>129</b>
<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>129</b>
<b><i>Exploring Cosmologies</i></b> .....	<b>130</b>
<b><i>The Powers</i></b> .....	<b>132</b>
Nyame .....	133
Abosom .....	135
Experts and juju.....	136
Witches.....	137
Chiefs .....	138
Ancestors.....	139
Family .....	140
<b><i>Church Conceptualisations of the World</i></b> .....	<b>147</b>
Musama Disco Christo Church .....	147
Assemblies of God .....	158
<b><i>Conclusion</i></b> .....	<b>168</b>
<b>Marshalling the Powers: Continuities Between Religions</b> .....	<b>171</b>
<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>171</b>

<b><i>Moral Frameworks</i></b> .....	<b>172</b>
The ‘modern’ .....	173
The ‘cultural’ .....	175
<b><i>Approaches to Problems</i></b> .....	<b>177</b>
Combining religions.....	177
Combining denominations .....	181
<b><i>Negotiating Relatedness: Relationships Within Churches</i></b> .....	<b>185</b>
Family and religious bonds .....	192
<b><i>Conclusion</i></b> .....	<b>196</b>
<b>Marshalling the Powers: Continuities between ‘Religious’ and ‘Non-Religious’</b> .....	<b>198</b>
<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>198</b>
<b><i>Approaches to Problems</i></b> .....	<b>198</b>
Healthcare strategies .....	198
Money .....	206
<b><i>Negotiating Relatedness: The Interdependence of Social and Spiritual Relationships</i></b> .....	<b>208</b>
Dependence of the spiritual on the social.....	209
Dependence of the social on the spiritual.....	217
Suspicion and secrecy .....	220
<b><i>Conclusion</i></b> .....	<b>222</b>
<b>Conclusion: The Challenge of the Everyday</b> .....	<b>223</b>
<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>223</b>
<b><i>Categories and Continuities</i></b> .....	<b>223</b>
<b><i>Towards an Alternative Framework</i></b> .....	<b>225</b>
The Powers.....	225
Negotiation.....	230
<b><i>Implications</i></b> .....	<b>231</b>
Social science thinking.....	232
The study of Christianity in Africa.....	235
Development studies and practice.....	236
<b>References</b> .....	<b>241</b>

# List of Pictures, Tables and Maps

## Pictures

4.1	Ndwumizili, view from hotel roof looking west	101
4.2	Ndwumizili school	106
4.3	Children fetching water from a public well	106
4.4	Selling meat pies along the beach	107
4.5	Carrying sugarcane back from the farm	107
4.6	MDCC building	116
4.7	MDCC cross with buckets of water placed in preparation for prayers and bathing ritual	118
4.8	Ndwumizili MDCC congregation	119
4.9	Giving the ‘free’ offering, MDCC	119
4.10	AG church building	123
4.11	Ndwumizili AG service (Sunday school)	125
4.12	Ndwumizili AG children’s Sunday school	127
4.13	Ndwumizili AG prayers	127
5.1	<i>Gye Nyame</i>	134
5.2	<i>Gye Nyame</i> incorporated into the design of a chair	134
5.3	The most recent Head Prophet of the MDCC	149
5.4	Women dancing during an MDCC service	149
5.5	The main street of Mozano, showing the mausoleum of the founder in the foreground, the Jubilee Temple in the centre (venue for the main meetings) and the Holy of Holies behind	156
5.6	MDCC members worshipping at the Peace Festival	156
5.7	MDCC choir parading at the Peace Festival	157
5.8	Stall in Mozano selling rings, crosses, oil, rosaries, incense and other MDCC paraphernalia	157
5.9	AG pastors worshipping at the annual Easter convention, wearing 75 <sup>th</sup> anniversary cloth	166
5.10	Dancing at the AG 75 <sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, wearing anniversary T-shirts and caps	166
5.11	AG regional office, Takoradi	167
5.12	Parade through Takoradi, part of the 75th anniversary celebrations	167
7.1	MDCC prayers: the female pastor holds out a baby to the cross (the male pastor stands robed in white in the background)	205
7.2	MDCC prayers: the female pastor and elders pray for a young woman, placing their hands on her head as she kneels	205
8.1	“Predicting the ‘two akonfem goals’ before the match”	240

## **Tables**

2.1	Trends in Christianity in Africa, 1800-2008	35
3.1	AG and MDCC member life history interviews	71
3.2	Interviews with non-AG and non-MDCC members	72
4.1	Church membership numbers and attendance rates in Ndwumizili	109
4.2	Overview of churches in Ndwumizili	112

## **Maps**

4.1	Location of Ndwumizili	103
4.2	Ndwumizili	103

# Abbreviations

ACMC	Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology
AG	Assemblies of God
AIC	African Indigenous/Initiated/Independent Church
CEB	Christian Base Community ( <i>Comunidad Eclesial de Base</i> )
CPP	Convention People's Party
FBO	Faith-Based Organisation
GILLBT	Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Languages and Bible Translation
ICGC	International Central Gospel Church
JSS	Junior Secondary School
MDCC	Musama Disco Christo Church
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PCC	Pentecostal-Charismatic Church
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist
SIM	Sudan Interior Mission
SMA	Society of African Missions (Catholic)
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
UGCC	United Gold Coast Convention
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WEC	World Evangelisation Crusade
WFDD	World Faiths Development Dialogue

# Glossary

<i>abosom</i> (pl.); <i>obosom</i> (sg.)	secondary deities (Fante)
<i>abusua</i>	matrilineal lineage, family (Fante, Ahanta)
<i>adinkra</i>	symbols traditionally printed on cloth in villages near Kumasi
Ahanta	predominant ethnic group of Ndwumizili
<i>Akaboha</i>	title given to head of MDCC (Musama ‘Tongue’)
Akan	majority ethnic group of southern Ghana
<i>Akatitibi</i>	title given to wife of MDCC head (Musama ‘Tongue’)
Asante	ethnic group centred in Kumasi (Brong-Ahafo Region), sub-division of Akan
assessment	fixed sum of money required to be sent by each MDCC station to head office
cedi	Ghanaian currency: in 2005-06, £1 = approximately 17,000 cedis
chop	eat (slang)
dash	give, gift, tip (slang)
Fante	ethnic group east of Ahanta, sub-division of Akan
Florida water	toilet water scented with floral essential oils
<i>fufu</i>	staple dish of pounded cassava and plantain banana or yam
Ga	ethnic group native to Accra region
juju	occult activity
<i>Kundum</i>	annual festival celebrated by Ahantas and Nzemas
<i>mallam</i>	Islamic-associated holy man, spiritualist
<i>Mozano</i>	‘my town’ (Musama ‘Tongue’), holy city of MDCC
Nackabah	Church of the Twelve Apostles
<i>Nahatan</i>	prayer group within MDCC
<i>nsinli</i>	juju practitioner (Ahanta)
NVivo	qualitative data analysis software
<i>Nyaamankose</i>	God (Akan)
<i>Nyame</i>	God (Akan)
<i>Nyaminli</i>	God (Ahanta)
<i>nyesie</i>	juju practitioner (Fante)
Nzema	ethnic group west of Ahanta
<i>oburoni</i>	white person (Akan)

<i>Onyame</i>	God (Akan)
<i>osofo</i>	pastor (Akan, Ahanta)
<i>osofo maame</i>	pastor's wife, female pastor (Akan, Ahanta)
station	local branch of MDCC
<i>sunsumsore</i>	'spiritual' church (Akan)
<i>Tweduapon</i>	God (Akan)
Twɪ	language of some Akan groups
<i>Yinaabi</i>	MDCC ritual prayer
<i>yovo</i>	white person (Ewe, commonly used in Togo)



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# Abstract

Engagement with religion has recently become an important issue to development theoreticians, donors and practitioners. It is recognised that religion plays a key role in shaping moral frameworks and social identities, but little attention is paid to how this is played out in everyday life: the focus remains on ‘faith communities’ and ‘faith-based organisations’ as unified bodies. This thesis uses ethnographic methods to examine how members of two churches in rural Ghana are influenced by and engage with religion. Rather than viewing religion simply as (potentially) instrumental to development, it seeks to approach it in its own right. It challenges the rigidity of categories such as ‘physical/spiritual’ and ‘religious/non-religious’, and the notion of ‘faith communities’ as discrete, unified entities with coherent religious cosmologies.

Insights from witchcraft studies and medical anthropology indicate that spiritual discourses are drawn on to negotiate hybrid and continuously changing modernities, and people tend to act pragmatically, combining and moving between discourses rather than fully espousing a particular ideology. Residents of the village studied appear to inhabit a world of different but interconnecting powers, which they are both, to some extent, subject to and able to marshal. These include God, secondary deities, juju, witchcraft, family authorities, traditional leaders, biomedicine and churches. Relationships with both spirits and humans are ambivalent and each of these powers can bring both blessings and harm. Religious experience is fluid, eclectic and pragmatic as people continually enter and exit groups and marshal different powers simultaneously to protect themselves from harm and procure blessings. Approaches by the development world seeking to engage with religion and to take seriously local people’s interests and viewpoints should thus be wary of oversimplification according to traditional Western social science categories, and be underpinned by an understanding of how religious discourses are interpreted and enacted in people’s everyday lives.

# Introduction

## Introduction

This thesis is about everyday religion in a village in southern Ghana. It explores a world in which spiritual powers—God, local deities, ancestors, evil spirits, herbalists, witches—are just as undoubtedly real as other powers, such as family, state, traditional leaders and biomedicine. A world where people do not face the question of what to believe in, but the challenge of how to position themselves in relation to all of these powers simultaneously in order to achieve and maintain the best possible advantage in life. It therefore tells a story of protecting from harm and procuring blessings; of people living in a context of contested moralities making pragmatic decisions regarding which powers to trust, which to obey, which to reject and which to bargain with.

Religion in this context is not an abstract, philosophical concept; nor is it confined to the emotional and the sentimental. It is intensely practical and acutely relevant to the realities of day-to-day living. It is also, therefore, extremely pertinent to issues facing development policymakers and practitioners in Ghana, as suggested by the emerging debate on the relationship between development and religion. In this chapter I give an overview of this debate, starting with the neglect of religion that, until recently, characterised the social sciences and in particular development studies, and highlighting some of the limitations of current work. In the second part of the chapter I introduce the approach of the thesis to this topic, giving an outline of the chapters to follow.

# Religion and Development

## ***The resurgence of religion***

In recent years the study of religion in the humanities and social sciences has steadily increased: the British Library holds nearly 5,000 items on religion published between 2000 and 2005, compared with approximately 2,000 published during the equivalent period twenty years earlier. Much of this reflects a growing awareness of the significance of religion in international politics, particularly concerning developing countries. In 1993 Haynes remarked, “in the early 1990s it is still difficult to locate a major work on the politics of development that bothers to devote a chapter to [religion]” (Haynes 1993: 5). Ten years later, Petito and Hatzopoulos (2003) published their contributory volume, *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile*, arguing that religion has been deliberately excluded from international politics since the end of the Wars of Religion in early modern Europe, and it is only in recent years that both politicians and scholars of international relations have been obliged to take note of the politics of religion. This ‘exile’—from both international and domestic politics—reflects a wider philosophical and intellectual shift to Enlightenment thinking, which privileged rationality and science over mysticism and tradition, leading to the separation of powers in the state. The development of different specialist disciplines resulted in religion being relegated to theology or to the margins of other subjects, and all of this formed the basis for the project of modernisation which continues today. For religion, the implications of modernisation were (and still are, according to some modernisation theorists, for example Bruce (2002, 2003)) not only exclusion from politics and the public realm, but increasing secularisation of society in general, eventually leading to the demise of religion entirely.

The secularisation thesis has been contested<sup>1</sup>, firstly in the context of European society where, despite the continuing statistical decline in membership rates of established churches, authors point to differences between both Christian denominations and other religious traditions (Casanova 2003); to alternative forms of Christian affiliation (Cameron 2003) and distinctions between membership and belief (Davie 1994); and to a shift from ‘religion’ as involving a focus on “a transcendent

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<sup>1</sup> See Davie, Heelas & Woodhead (2003) for a collection of essays predicting the future of the religious landscape.

source of significance and authority to which individuals must conform” (Heelas & Woodhead 2005: 6), to ‘spirituality’ as a focus on “inner sources of significance and authority and the cultivation or sacralization of unique subjective-lives” (*ibid.*: 6). Secondly, the universality of the modernisation and secularisation paradigms has been challenged in light of evidence from elsewhere in the world that religion is not declining but, in many places, quite the opposite. To take Christianity alone, which is the focus of this thesis, churches appear to be multiplying and expanding rapidly in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South-East Asia as well as remaining strong in the USA (see for example Martin 2001; Barrett 2001). There is increasing awareness that ‘modernity’ is not a universal state to be arrived at through a standardising process of modernisation, but that there are, in the words of Jean and John Comaroff, “many modernities” (1993a: xi), to a large proportion of which religiosity and spirituality are intrinsic (Woodhead *et al.* 2003: 7). A recent example of this is given by Deeb (2006), in her study of Islamism and modernity in Beirut, which she portrays as “an enchanted modern”.

Haynes identifies three events at the end of the 1970s which pushed the politics of religion in the third world to the forefront: the Islamic revolution in Iran, the civil war between communists and Islamists in Afghanistan, and the overthrow of Nicaragua’s dictator, Somoza, by the Sandinista government which was highly influenced by radical Christianity. These, he argues, were manifestations of deeper interrelated changes since the 1960s. Firstly, the ‘Third World’ or ‘developing world’ emerged “as a culturally fragmented, frequently politically unstable, economically diverse group of states, with burgeoning populations” (Haynes 1993: 2), which were obliged to accept an international status quo with which they had little other affinity. Secondly, these countries found themselves living in a tension between the desire to modernise and the wish to hold on to their cultural and religious heritage at a time of “almost unprecedented political, economic and technological change” (*ibid.*: 2), including leaps in communications and travel which, thirdly, have led to a shrinking world where issues and events in one region immediately become known about and relevant to societies in another. More recently, a rising awareness of Islam in the West and in particular the assertion of fundamentalist ideas and power within and against Western society has drawn religion sharply onto the Western political agenda. Writing in the light of the events of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 and the subsequent association of religious ‘fundamentalism’ with terrorism and insecurity, Thomas

places the global resurgence of religion as “part of the larger crisis of modernity” (2003: 22). It reflects a disillusionment with the ‘modern’ ethos which refuses to recognise the existence or relevance of anything outside the positivist epistemology of science and rationality; a failure of modernisation to produce democracy and development in less-developed countries; and a “struggle for cultural liberation, or the global struggle for authenticity”, as part of a “revolt against the West” (*ibid.*: 22).

### ***Views from development***

The process of neglect followed by renewed interest in religion has also been reflected within development circles. Ver Beek (2000) puts forward three reasons why religion has been neglected in development. Firstly, there is “the fear of imposing or appearing to impose an outsider’s perspective” (p.39). Secondly, he points to the tendency in modern Western society to separate and oppose the sacred and the secular. Thirdly, he suggests that religion is seen as potentially harmful for society and there is a fear of inciting or compounding religious conflict. Buijs suggests four further perspectives which might lead to a neglect of engagement with religion:

- a. modernisation or development will drive out religion;
- b. religion is a private affair and hence is socially irrelevant;
- c. some people have the wrong religion for development anyway;
- d. religion cannot be changed or influenced.

(Buijs 2004: 105)

Development is also, of course, linked with the modernist ethos of rationality. Religion has therefore posed a problem in that it is associated with irrationality and ‘tradition’, which have been seen as barriers to development.

However, in the context of the wider renewal of interest in religion and spirituality, within the development industry religion is now emerging as a focus of attention. Conceptualisations of and approaches to development have changed over time, reflecting deeper philosophical shifts such as mentioned above and in particular the rise of postmodernist discourse. Nederveen Pieterse identifies trends in development theory over the course of the twentieth century as moving from macro-structures;

structuralism; determinism; homogeneity and generalisation; singularity; and Eurocentrism to actor-orientation, agency and institutions; constructivism; interpretivism; differentiation; pluralism; and polycentrism (2001: 13). The overall shift to a wider, more contested and pluralised view of development has permitted greater engagement with religion as playing a role in development other than as part of a homogenising colonialist force, but it has also, in deconstructing the values of development from a polycentric perspective, led to an awareness of the importance of religion in shaping the “economic, social and cultural fabric” (Van Harskamp 2004: 2) of developing countries, and thus the views that poor people have of development itself.

In the same year as Ver Beek labelled spirituality “a development taboo” (Ver Beek 2000), the World Bank published *Voices of the Poor* (Narayan *et al.* 2000a, 2000b), its preparatory study for the *World Development Report 2000-2001: Attacking Poverty* (World Bank 2001). One of the recurrent themes emerging from *Voices of the Poor*, which was a participatory project aiming to gather views on poverty of poor people from around the world, was the importance of religion in the lives of many of the participants. This study was drawn on during a conference in Nairobi also in 2000, organised by the World Bank and the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa and entitled *Faith in Development: Partnership between the World Bank and the Churches of Africa*:

Deepa Narayan’s paper, ‘Voices of the Poor,’ summarizing the World Bank’s massive study, highlights a major reason for taking the role of religious organizations seriously: they are among the poor and the poor trust them more than any other organizations except their own social institutions. (Belshaw *et al.*: 2001: 4)

This statement illustrates one of the underlying characteristics of much discourse on religion and development, implicit in the title ‘Faith in Development’: the central issue is the instrumental role that religion can play in advancing the aims and achievements of development. Rakodi (2007) draws on Clarke (2006) to highlight how religion has been used by politicians and governments even of secular states to advance their own agendas, either by mobilising the support of religious sectors of the population (notably in the USA), by channelling assistance towards policies and regimes with which they have a religious affinity (for example Arab support for the

conflict in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union), or by using “religion instrumentally or symbolically to unite disparate populations or enlist their support for particular policies, for example by appealing to ‘Asian’ or ‘Islamic’ values” (Rakodi 2007: 12). Since the 1980s religious groups have also increasingly taken on roles as service providers (as they have also done historically, through missions), both in developed countries such as the UK and USA, and in developing countries: in 2005 the Ghanaian government handed back control of many state schools to the churches from which they had been nationalised a few decades earlier.

While governments use religion instrumentally, this is also how the topic is approached in most development literature on the subject, including that produced by both practitioners and academics. The World Bank, as we have seen, has initiated partnership with churches in Africa in order to help achieve its poverty reduction goals: “The Church is important in Africa, so it is important for the World Bank as well” (Calderisi 2001: 64). Carole Rakodi’s working paper of the Religions and Development Research Group (RaD) cited above (Rakodi 2007) is entitled *Understanding the Roles of Religions in Development: The Approach of the RaD Programme*. Similar phraseology is used by other authors: *Idealism and Practicality: The Role of Religion in Development* (Tyndale 2003); *The Role of Religion in Development: Towards a New Relationship between the European Union and Africa* (Ter Haar & Ellis 2006). Of course, for those whose primary objective is the advancement of development, their perspective on religion could be expected to be largely instrumental, asking questions like “how, in practical terms, religious networks or institutions could contribute to development” (Ter Haar & Ellis 2006: 363). However, the interest in religion of development theoreticians and practitioners does not stem entirely from a self-imposed, calculated scheme to incorporate religious bodies into the development agenda. Religion has, in fact, always been involved in international development, from the first ‘civilising’ missionary endeavours in pre-colonial times which included attempts to provide education and healthcare—well before ‘development’ emerged as a discipline and an industry (see Violett 2003). It has therefore not been necessary actively to involve religion in development: a notion of realising divine love through charitable action is already central to many religions, so that development (primarily in the sense of aid) is seen by some as “a secularised derivative of a religious view” (Van Harskamp 2004: 2; see also Ter Haar & Ellis 2006). Religion has thus always been an integral part of the



development arena, although its role has not always been recognised as legitimate by secular development agencies and academics.

Drawing on a study of 63 American Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), Kniss and Campbell assert that religious orientation makes little difference either to the size of relief and development programmes or to the actual programme activities (Kniss & Campbell 1997). However, differences in attitudes and approaches to development based on religious-moral grounds have meant that as well as providing opportunities for partnership, the work of religious groups in development has been problematic for secular development agencies, making the latter reluctant to engage with the former. A key example of this has been the unwillingness of Catholic and other religious agencies to promote the use of condoms in programmes aimed at curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS. This barrier to collaboration is related to a deeper cause, stemming from ideological concerns based on the secular nature of the modern Western state, the separation between church and state. This of course varies between countries with, for example, religion playing a far greater role in US politics than in French. As well as governments taking into careful consideration the extent to which they want to be associated with religious bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also wary, partly because they may have their own secularist values and answer to a supporter pool which may not be sympathetic to religious groups, and partly because much of their funding is likely to come from governments and equally secular supra-national bodies. On the other hand, as religious bodies remain important and influential in many developed as well as developing countries, there is also pressure for governments and NGOs to engage with them.

Faith-based organisations constitute a diverse group, categorised by Clarke (2006: 840) into five main types: i) faith-based representative organisations or apex bodies; ii) faith-based charitable or development organisations; iii) faith-based socio-political organisations; iv) faith-based missionary organisations; and v) faith-based illegal or terrorist organisations. These vary enormously in their activities, agendas and motivations, including the amount of weight given to the religion itself. Some missionary groups choose not to involve themselves in development work, leaving it to development ‘specialists’ and concentrating on their own ‘specialism’,

evangelism. Vincent Donovan, an American Spiritan priest serving in Tanzania for a Catholic mission, included in his description of true missionary work:

To give the people nothing, literally *nothing*, but the unchanging, supra-cultural, uninterpreted gospel before baptism. (Donovan 2004: 121)

Some FBOs emphasise their faith and hold it as their motivation and defining characteristic, for example Tearfund, which engages in both development work and evangelism as “integral mission”:

people need to know that Christ died to save them, but they also need to be shown unconditional love, by someone who’ll come alongside them and help them find a way out of poverty. This is integral mission – mission that reaches out and recognises people’s spiritual and physical needs. (Tearfund website)

Others acknowledge their Christian identity purely as the founding motivation of the organisation, explicitly distancing themselves from any charges of proselytism. The microfinance organisation Opportunity International UK states on its website:

Opportunity International was founded by two highly successful entrepreneurs who, as Christians, wanted to love their neighbours and serve the poor. Whilst Opportunity International is a Christian organisation, we serve people of all faiths and those of no faith. There is no intent to convert people we serve to Christianity. (Opportunity International UK website)

This dissociation from specifically religious or spiritual agendas has been necessary for FBOs to access funding and support from secular development agencies and donors, which have been unwilling to transcend the opposition between religious and secular by associating themselves with any faith traditions. However, as Clarke (2006) emphasises, FBOs, including missionary organisations, socio-political organisations and representative organisations and apex bodies as well as charitable and development organisations, have been recognised as a significant force in development, with which the rest of the industry must increase their engagement:

The challenge posed by the convergence of faith and development is to engage with faith discourses and associated organizations, which seem counter-developmental or culturally exotic to secular

and technocratic worldviews, in building the complex multistakeholder partnerships increasingly central to the fight against global poverty. Put simply, in development contexts, *faith matters!* (Clarke 2006: 846)

There have recently been calls for development to engage more deeply with religion on other levels than that of collaboration with FBOs. Over the last two decades development actors, including the World Bank, the UN and Western governmental development agencies, have become increasingly aware of the importance of cultural issues. In 1999 the then president of the World Bank, James D. Wolfensohn, declared to a conference in Florence, “[h]owever you define culture, it is increasingly clear that those of us working in the field of sustainable development ignore it at our peril” (Wolfensohn 1999 cited by Verhelst with Tyndale 2002: 4), and by 2002 Verhelst could assert, “[t]he socio-cultural aspects of development are now established as elements of the official development agenda”, although he goes on to note, “[a]ll this is encouraging, but the importance of cultural issues to development is far from being universally accepted” (*ibid.*: 4-5). In 2004 the book *Culture and Public Action*, sponsored by the World Bank, was published, “examin[ing] some of the positive and normative implications of taking culture on board in improving how public action alleviates poverty and reduces inequality in the world’s less affluent countries” (Rao & Walton 2004: 3).

Religion is often viewed as an element of culture, with livelihoods models, for example, incorporating it within “social capital” (Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Approach, see Carney 1998) or “cultural resources” (Resource Profiles Framework, Lawson, McGregor & Saltmarshe 2000). Recently, though, development theoreticians and practitioners have been challenged to make space for engagement specifically with religion. Ver Beek argues that part of all development research and practice should be recognition, understanding and discussion of the importance of spirituality in people’s lives, basing this on his claim that “[f]or most people of the ‘South’, spirituality is integral to their understanding of the world and their place in it, and so is central to the decisions they make about their own and their communities’ development” (Ver Beek 2000: 31). Ter Haar and Ellis start from a similar premise, asserting that “religion, whatever form it takes, constitutes a social and political reality” (2006: 353) and, more specifically in Africa, “religion is central to people’s world-views” (*ibid.*: 365). They therefore contend that religion, and

religious networks in particular, have the potential to make an important contribution to development in Africa if they are both understood and affirmed in their positive aspects<sup>2</sup>: “European development policy needs to be rethought in terms of the world-views of those most immediately concerned, the very people whom development policies seek to assist” (p.365).

The primary motivation for engaging with religion set out by Ter Haar and Ellis in their 2006 paper is that religious networks have the potential to be actively beneficial to development. However, since religion is often central to the way people view, interpret and act in the world, even where the focus of development policy is not on the activities or networks of religious groups it is still important to gain an understanding of the way religious discourses are played out in people’s everyday lives. This is not at all self-evident, and the form that religion and religious institutions are often assumed to take is not necessarily the way they work out on the ground. Neither should it be taken for granted that religious groups will necessarily be sympathetic or willing to adhere to the values of development agencies. Religion also has perspectives on development: not only does it contribute to shaping people’s values, desires and understanding of development, but it can also act as a powerful critique of dominant development models. Islamic discourses, for example, question values espoused by much of development relating to, among other things, democracy, gender, ethics and the idea of infinite progress (see Binder 1988; Elmessiri 2003).

Religion in social science is often talked about in terms of organisations, which function as convenient blocks with which to break down and quantify something that is in many ways intangible and ungraspable. Thus Clarke (2006) focuses on the role of “faith-based organisations” in development; the World Bank uses terms like “religious organisations” and “faith communities” (Belshaw *et al.* 2001) to set out the basis of its engagement with religion; the central purpose of the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) is, according to Marshall, “to use dialogue to bridge the gulf of understanding separating development and faith institutions” (Marshall n.d.: 10). Of course, the institutional aspect of religion is important: this is where decisions and rulings on doctrine and policy are made, where the voice of members

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<sup>2</sup> See also the conference organised by Cordaid, ICCO and ISS in Soesterberg, September 2005: *Religion: A Source for Human Rights and Development Cooperation* (Cordaid *et al.* 2006).

may be expressed, and where the potential for dialogue and cooperation with external agencies is found. However, such an approach tends to essentialise religion. It should not be assumed that such institutions necessarily represent discrete religious communities with coherent beliefs and secure boundaries, or that they encompass everything that can be considered 'religious'. Within Christianity, for example, there may be enormous differences between the official policy of a church as set out by its head office and the activities of local churches on the ground; there may also be great divergence between the official doctrines and teachings of a local church and the beliefs, values and practices of its members. Attending or belonging to a church does not necessarily entail full acceptance of or compliance with its values and teachings; nor does it exclude acceptance of or engagement with other religious or non-religious traditions. Members of churches may interpret and draw on religious discourses in many different ways, influenced by other socio-cultural discourses within which they live. Outcomes may also vary from what might be expected of certain religious discourses. Burdick, for example, has compared Catholic 'Christian Base Communities' (CEBs) following principles of liberation theology in Brazil with Pentecostal churches that, among other things, place a strong emphasis on submission of women to men and less value on literacy and social action. He has demonstrated that, despite the explicit aim of the CEBs to empower, empowerment is actually achieved more effectively through the Pentecostal groups (Burdick 1992). Moreover, the composition of congregations and 'faith communities' is neither uniform nor constant: firstly, members of the same church may differ enormously in their relationship with that church; secondly, members may move between—or in and out of—groups, drawing on discourses from different churches and even different religions either sequentially or simultaneously.

In order for the development world to engage fully with religion, then, it must not only consider ways of putting into place possibilities for development contributions and collaborations among religious organisations, but must also be meaningful and relevant to the reality of people's daily lives. This calls for, as well as analysis focussing on FBOs and religious institutions, research that considers the complexities and ambiguities of religion in everyday life.

## Summary of Thesis

This thesis seeks to challenge both the instrumentality of the approach to religion of much of the development world and the essentialising nature of its assumed coherence and securely defined boundaries. In order to do this it explores in detail the experiences of religion in everyday life in the context of one community, a village in southern Ghana, where ‘traditional religion’ exists alongside Christian churches, and where ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ coexist, interact and shape each other in terms not only of religion, but also of social structures, values and practices. Because Christianity is the only religion present in the village aside from ‘traditional religious’ practices, this is where the focus of the thesis lies. Other religions are excluded from analysis simply because they do not enter into the experiences of the respondents.

Chapter 2 locates the study with reference to the vast body of literature on Christianity in Africa—and more specifically Ghana—situating it both historically and in terms of the diverse spectrum of different churches and denominations that constitutes the Ghanaian Christian landscape. It then focuses on two of the key debates within this literature: the relationship between Christianity and culture and between Christianity and modernity. Regarding the former, the notion of ‘Africanisation’ is key, in particular the focus in the 1970s and 1980s on African Indigenous Churches (AICs) as potential purveyors of an authentic expression of African Christianity. This gives way to analyses which question the essentialist implications of such a search for authenticity which risks reifying both African traditional religion and specific Christian denominational groupings, and highlight the plural and interrelated nature of religious discourses and groups. Discussions of religious responses to modernity have been dominated by the rapid expansion of Pentecostalism since the 1980s, seen by some as largely a continuation of the ‘spiritual’ AICs and by others primarily as an American Evangelical export. Either way, Pentecostalism is intrinsically linked with modernity, providing an arena in which people can interpret the modern world through religious discourses. The issues emerging from these debates centre around the place of religion and spirituality in the worldview of Africans. While it is claimed by many (Ellis & Ter Haar 2004; Mbiti 1989) that Africans are intrinsically and pervasively religious, Africans themselves do not necessarily view the world as such: although the relationship

between the physical and the spiritual is one of continuity rather than separation as in much of the Western world, this does not amount to an inherently religious society as all that is ‘spiritual’ is not necessarily considered ‘religious’. Moreover, it would seem that most Ghanaians encounter Christianity largely at an existential level rather than in abstract theological terms. These points are emphasised in the second part of the chapter, through the use of other bodies of literature to gain insight into how religion is played out in everyday life. Studies in medical anthropology demonstrate the pragmatism of people living within and drawing on plural medical systems—both ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’—without necessarily experiencing contradiction. Through anthropological research into increasing reports of witchcraft in Africa we see how people draw on spiritual discourses to manage the uncertainties of modernity. Moreover, such studies, along with wider African studies literature, highlight the underlying importance and ambivalence of human relationships, which are also lived out with reference to discourses on spiritual power.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study. My aim in this thesis is to capture as closely as possible the experiences and perspectives of the people who form the focus of the research; therefore an ethnographic approach was appropriate, where the precise research questions emerged and were repeatedly redefined during the process of pre-fieldwork preparation (both reading literature and through previous experience), the fieldwork itself, as I gradually became familiar with the lives of the participants, and the post-fieldwork analysis and writing, where the data were interrogated and pulled together in the light of each other and of the insights of other research. The chapter is divided into three sections. First, I trace the development of the research question and the research design; second, I give an account of the process of data collection, including an overview of site selection and methods used, and a discussion of the centrality of relationships in participant observation. Third, I discuss the analysis of the data and the construction of the narrative, considering the challenge of researching and writing about religion within social science. Underlying the chapter—and the thesis—is the theme of negotiation. Neither the research question, nor the data collection, nor the analysis and writing have conformed to a pre-conceived set model: each has emerged through a process of negotiation, primarily between my ideas and experiences, other literature, and the subjects of the research. Relationships, particularly the relationship between the researcher and the participants, are core to the research and to a very large extent determine its direction

and outcome. Relationships within the field, as well as the ‘baggage’ brought to the field and to the data by the researcher, tied up in her own identity, shape the research in many ways, affecting access to data, the type of data obtained, the level of empathy and understanding it is possible to attain, the questions that are asked and the issues picked up on. Identity is not fixed, and the researcher can—and inevitably does, both consciously and unconsciously—adopt roles and influence relationships throughout the fieldwork period; however the construction of relationships is, of course, a mutual process of which the fieldworker is not entirely in control. In this chapter I highlight the importance of recognising the presence and voice of the researcher in the research, and discuss some of the issues and dilemmas involved in such an approach.

The section of the thesis comprising chapters 4 to 7 presents and discusses the empirical findings of the case study, and is structured in three parts. The first, Chapter 4, introduces the context of the research, describing the socio-economic environment of the village in which it is located and the churches which are the focus of the study. The second, Chapter 5, explores the worldviews of the participants in the research, examining how they perceive and interpret the world around them. The third, comprising Chapters 6 and 7, asks how people manage this world through their relationships and their actions.

Chapter 4 locates the village of Ndwumizili, the community at the centre of the thesis, within its geographical, historical and socio-economic setting before giving an overview of the local church context. There are numerous congregations in the village, including mission churches, African indigenous churches and Pentecostal churches, and they encompass great diversity as well as many shared characteristics. Detailed descriptions of the two congregations at the heart of the research, the Ghanaian indigenous Musama Disco Christo Church and the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church, are provided, setting the scene for the analysis to follow.<sup>3</sup>

While ‘religion’ is often recognised as being important in Africa, what that means to people on an everyday level is less clear. The objective in Chapter 5 is to build, in terms of religious imaginaries, a picture of the world as perceived by the inhabitants

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the thesis pseudonyms have been substituted for the names of respondents and local places.



of Ndwumizili. Rather than reifying categories such as ‘traditional religion’ by attempting a comprehensive overview of a particular ethnic cosmological system, I set out shared notions and patterns of thought underlying a localised cosmology and characterised by a range of powers, both spiritual and physical. In the second half of the chapter I turn to the two churches on which the case study focuses. I identify continuities and contrasts between the two, for each one outlining its history and structure and examining how, in light of the cosmological patterns distinguished in the previous section, the world is conceptualised in its doctrines and practices.

Having mapped out the ground in terms of what people’s lives are like and how they perceive the world, in Chapters 6 and 7 I explore how members of the two churches draw on the religious discourses discussed in Chapter 5 to manage that world in their relationships and their actions, and to place themselves in the best possible position within the cosmological landscape defined in their worldview. Through an examination of how people go about marshalling the powers that populate this landscape, both in addressing problems and in negotiating relationships, two key categorical divisions frequently imposed by social science analyses of religion are challenged. In Chapter 6 I consider the division between different religious traditions, in this case between Christianity and ‘traditional religion’, but also between different denominations and sectors of Christianity. Marshalling the powers in order to procure blessings and to protect from harm can involve moving between and combining denominations and religions while negotiating a moral framework informed by church and cultural discourses. Key to this are, firstly, the relationship between the churches and culture: the extent to which, for example, concepts and practices associated with ‘traditional religion’ are constructed as immoral in church discourse; secondly, how far people feel it is possible for them to influence outcomes by engaging with (and influencing) the various powers; and, thirdly, the constraining influences which determine which powers they choose to interact with and to what extent. Chapter 7 discusses the division between ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’. It considers how things normally considered secular, such as biomedicine and money, are incorporated into or combined with ‘religious’ approaches to problems without contradiction, while ‘religious’ strategies are often considered more pragmatic than religious. Underlying this is continuity between the ‘physical’ and the ‘spiritual’, which is reflected in the relational dimension of life: relationships with spirits and relationships with humans are interdependent. Relatedness is ambivalent, bringing

both harm and benefits, but it cannot be escaped, and people are constantly and simultaneously in relationship with other people, with institutions such as the family, and with spirits such as ancestors and gods. They therefore continually have to negotiate and renegotiate their position in relation to each of these, in order to protect themselves from harm and acquire blessings.

Chapter 8 summarises and draws together the analysis of the preceding chapters and considers its relevance to the emerging debate on religion and development. It highlights some of the inappropriate preconceptions and assumptions that are often found in social science analyses—particularly in artificially imposed categories and divisions—and in contrast emphasises the diversity, fluidity, eclecticism and multiplicity of religious experience. It offers a warning that if the engagement of development with religion is to be meaningful to the people it is aiming to help, it must not ignore the complexity of how religion is constructed in the reality of their everyday lives.

# Debates around Christianity in Ghana: Approaches to Culture and Modernity

## Introduction

At 69%, Ghana has one of the highest rates of Christianity in the world (Ghana Statistical Service 2002), and Ghanaians make no attempt to hide the importance of this religion in their society. It is made overwhelmingly obvious not only by the sheer number of churches in towns and villages, advertising themselves with huge banners ('Winners Chapel, the Home of Breakthroughs'), but also by the names of businesses ('Finger of God Bakery'; 'Jesus Loves Fashion') and slogans on taxis and buses ('Relax, God is in Control'; 'Only Jesus'; 'God's Time'). A closer look reveals a vast assortment of churches, doctrines, beliefs and practices, interconnecting and interrelating with each other and with society on multiple levels. In recent years Christianity in Ghana and its growth and impact have been documented by both Western and African scholars from a variety of perspectives: historical studies of a particular mission or social movement (Hawkins 1997); studies of the development of Christianity in specific locations (Middleton 1983) or on a more general level (Sackey 2001); close studies of churches (De Witte 2003a; Fancello 2003), denominations (Sackey 1991; Gifford 1994, 2004a; Larbi 2001a) or groups (Asamoah-Gyadu 1997). Pentecostalism emerges as a significant focus of attention (Amanor 2004; Gifford 2004a, 2004b; Hackett 1998; Larbi 2001a, 2001b; Meyer 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2004; Van Dijk 1997, 2002; Asamoah-Gyadu 1997, 2006), along with studies concerning the relationship between Christianity and traditional culture (Larbi 2001b; Van der Geest 2002, Onyinah 2001), and between Christianity and modernity (De Witte 2003a; Gifford 2004a; Meyer 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1999). These studies are set in the context of a much larger body of literature on Christianity in Africa, much of which is highly relevant to the situation in Ghana. In this review, therefore, I draw on this wider literature in order to discuss two of the key debates in the study of Christianity on the continent: its relationship with culture

and with modernity. These debates tend to concentrate on the emergence and the discourses of different denominational categories, particularly African Initiated Churches (AICs), mission churches and Pentecostal churches (here I focus on the AICs and Pentecostals as the types relevant to the case study later in the thesis); so in the second part of the review I switch the perspective away from church institutions to look at how people draw on religious discourses in everyday life, first relating to ‘culture’ and secondly to ‘modernity’. I start, though, by situating the topic: first historically, giving an overview of the history of Christianity in Ghana, and then in terms of the different types of churches found in present-day Ghanaian society.

## **Part 1: Christianity in Ghana: Institutional Landscape and Key Debates**

### ***A brief history of Christianity in Ghana***

The first missionary contact in Ghana came in the fifteenth century when Catholic missionaries accompanied Portuguese traders into West Africa. However, it appears that these missionaries had little lasting influence (Amanor 2004), and another three centuries passed before the era of Christianisation began. Amanor (2004) traces its development through the activities of the various mission organisations that arrived in the region during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These included the Moravian missionaries who arrived in 1730, the Church of England Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) from 1754, the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society from 1828, the Wesleyan Missionary Society from 1835, the German Lutheran Bremen mission from 1847, the Roman Catholic Society of African Missions (SMA) from 1880, and later independent Pentecostal missionaries from the Apostolic Church of Bradford (1937), and the American Assemblies of God (1931). To start with these missions largely focused on southern regions. There is a distinct cultural, geographic and demographic division between the north and south of what is now Ghana: in crude terms the south, where the three largest cities are located, is green, fertile, and relatively densely populated, while the north is poorer with a hot, dry climate and sparse vegetation. The south holds cultural links with its neighbours in southern Togo and Côte d’Ivoire, whereas the north is more culturally related to ethnic groups in the north of those countries along with Burkina Faso and

Mali. As Europeans started to explore West Africa from the south, this is where the first missions were based, the north remaining to a large extent unevangelised until the twentieth century. This has resulted in a shift in the missionary position in present-day Ghana. Christianity has become strongly embedded in the society of much of southern Ghana, thus Christian missions are now primarily targeting northern areas where Islam and traditional religions predominate.

Western missionaries, however, are only part of the story. The African response to the missions was varied, and even where it was not hostile it took a range of forms. Scholars have identified several main African-led movements (Amanor 2004; Sackey 2001). These include Ethiopianism, from the second half of the nineteenth century, which looked to the one ‘truly African’ church that was not initiated and had never been controlled by white missionaries. The movement had political overtones: Isichei lists its origins in West and South Africa as “white discrimination against black mission agents, disputes over resources, a general feeling, among educated Africans, of being marginalized” (Isichei 1995: 179). White missionaries were associated with settlers and colonists, and no longer seen as authoritative in matters relating to Christianity. The resulting secessions from mainline and mission churches signified the birth of some of the ‘AICs’, variously termed as the African Indigenous, Independent or Initiated Churches.

More common in Ghana though, are another group of AICs, emerging in the 1920s, and known as *sunsumsore* or ‘spiritual’ churches (Sackey 2001), or Zionist Aladura churches (Amanor 2004). These were less political in nature, seeking to withdraw from power and form counter-societies rather than explicitly challenge the mission churches (Ranger 1986: 3). This category encompasses some quite diverse groups, having in common an emphasis on the spiritual, on prayer (Aladura meaning ‘praying people’), faith-healing, dreams and visions. Although there was within these churches a general sentiment of opposition to traditional religion which included the burning of religious ‘idols’ and artefacts, there were also attempts to reconcile Christianity and African culture. Some groups for instance accepted polygamy, identified witches and placed great weight on their leaders’ visions and revelations. Differences in opinions over such matters resulted in schisms and fragmentation: Hastings gives the example of the leaders of the Faith Tabernacle in Nigeria who were unable to accept Josiah Oshitelu’s permission of polygamy, pursuit of witches

and use of 'holy names' derived through his own divine revelation, with the result that Oshitelu founded his own Church of the Lord (Aladura) (Hastings 1994: 516-7). Also influential in the first half of the twentieth century were 'prophets' or individual preachers who travelled around the country usually dressed in a flowing gown and carrying a wooden cross, a Bible and a calabash of baptismal water. These men and (occasionally) women did not always establish their own churches. The most famous, Prophet William Wade Harris, is said to have converted 120,000 people to Christianity between 1913 and 1915 across Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, encouraging them to join existing Methodist or Roman Catholic churches, although where no church already existed (and sometimes also where they did) they often formed their own (see Amanor 2004; Hastings 1994 pp. 443-5).

As independence drew nearer the AICs rose in popularity, peaking in the 1960s and early 1970s. However, by the 1980s these churches were being overtaken in growth rates by new charismatic or neo-Pentecostal churches. Gifford (2004a: 38), drawing on surveys carried out by the Ghana Evangelism Committee in 1986-7 and 1991-2, points out that some of the AICs lost as many as 20% of their members during these five years, while the mission churches remained relatively steady (7% increase, although compared to a 17% increase in the country's population), and some charismatic churches increased by up to 100%. Found mostly in the urban centres, some of the latter now draw congregations of thousands to several services each Sunday. These new churches have been the focus of much recent attention by scholars seeking to explain their rise and their role in forming present and future Ghanaian society. Some of these authors (see for example Gifford 2004a) draw a strong distinction between the new charismatic churches and the older, 'classical Pentecostal' churches. Others (such as Meyer 1998a, 1998b, 2004), although acknowledging this as a new wave of Pentecostalism, do not distinguish between different types in their analysis. Various factors are given for the growth and popularity of these churches. Amanor suggests that the charismatic movement emerged from mainline churches adopting elements of Pentecostalism after seeing "transformed lives and the sense of nearness and reality of God" (2004: unpaginated) in the classical Pentecostal churches, whereas Gifford (2004a, 2004b) points to the external influence of American evangelical churches and preachers, along with socio-economic factors within Ghana itself creating an environment conducive to the popularity of the doctrines and organisational formats of these churches.

## ***Categorisation of churches***

Churches in 1980 Ghana have been categorised by Gifford into four main strands (Gifford 2004a: 20). The Catholic church remained the largest single denomination; the mainline Protestant churches included the Methodists, the Bremen and Basel Presbyterians and the Anglicans; the established Pentecostals (Apostolic Church, Church of Pentecost, Christ Apostolic Church and Assemblies of God) and the AICs, which were on the point of decline. Writing in 2004, he adds a further category representing the charismatic churches as powerful newcomers emerging over the last two decades of the twentieth century.

Foli (2001) has constructed a typology which divides the churches in Ghana into five slightly different categories. First, the ‘Historic Churches’ (p.6) include the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the A.M.E. Zion Church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Anglican Church, those which are often referred to as ‘mainline’, ‘mission’, ‘orthodox’ or ‘established’ churches. Characteristics of these churches are their thorough coverage of the country, their orthodox (Western) traditions and their long history in Ghana, most of them being established during the nineteenth century. The second category, ‘Other Mission-Related Churches’ (p.14), comprises churches stemming from more recent missionary activity in the second half of the twentieth century, such as the Evangelical Churches of Ghana (World Evangelization Crusade (WEC) Mission), the Good News Churches (SIM<sup>4</sup>), the Evangelical Lutheran Churches (Evangelical Lutheran Mission) and the Churches of Christ (Churches of Christ Mission). According to Foli, these missions have focused on ethnic groups native to northern Ghana, including northerners living temporarily or permanently in the south. Thirdly, Foli designates as the ‘Pentecostal Churches’ those churches “resulting from the missionaries [sic] activities of *Pentecostal Missions* that started work in the country in the early 1930s” (p.19), including the Assemblies of God, the Apostolic Church, the Christ Apostolic Church and the Church of Pentecost. Many of these churches have become well established and well organised in Ghana. Foli’s fourth category, the ‘Independent ‘Charismatic’ Churches’, refers to the new charismatic or neo-Pentecostal churches mentioned above, such as the Christian Action Faith Ministry, the Redemption Hour Faith Ministry and the International Central Gospel Church

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<sup>4</sup> Formerly Sudan Interior Mission.

(ICGC). Foli distinguishes these churches from his Pentecostal category, arguing that “the Charismatics opt for what is cultural or indigenous, are preoccupied with the performance of miracles and preach ‘prosperity gospel’ at the expense of salvation evangelism – exactly what the Pentecostals frown upon” (p.31). The final category identified by Foli is labelled the ‘Independent ‘Spiritual’ Churches’, which corresponds broadly to the AICs. Foli’s use of Baeta’s term ‘spiritual churches’ (no ref.) highlights their engagement “in activities that are either meant to invoke the Spirit of God or are meant to be signs of His descent upon the worshippers” (p.45). According to Foli over 600 different churches fall into this group, including the Twelve Apostles Church, The West African Water Healing Society, The Musama Disco Christo Church and the African Faith Tabernacle.

Each different denomination has its own organisational structure, some forming part of large international churches and others existing independently. There are various umbrella bodies and networks linking churches on a national level: the (mainline Protestant) Christian Council of Ghana; the Bishops’ Conference of the Catholic Church in Ghana; the Ghana Pentecostal Council; the Association of Spiritual Churches and the recently formed National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches.

Gifford’s and Foli’s typologies largely correspond, with Foli classing the Catholic church along with Gifford’s mainline protestant churches and instead separating out ‘Other Mission-Related Churches’ as a distinct category. Attempting to categorise such diversity is of course not easy, and some of the definitions and characteristics given above do not do justice either to variation within groups or to the blurred boundaries between them. For example, not all of the new charismatic churches promote indigenous culture: Gifford (2004a) shows that some, such as ICGC, are extremely modernist in orientation. Pentecostal churches also invoke the spirit of God, and AICs bear close similarities with some of the ‘historic’ churches in their use of liturgy and ritual. It is also important to note that much of the literature reviewed here focusses on urban experiences, so, for example, although Gifford (2004a) states that in 1980 AICs were declining and since then the charismatic churches have mushroomed, twenty-six years later in the village studied in this thesis, the AICs are still two of the largest churches while the charismatics have no institutional presence. Part of the aim of this thesis is to consider the extent to which



such divisions and groupings are significant to the way that Ghanaians themselves conceptualise, interact with and experience religion. Despite acknowledgement by scholars of the problems inherent in discussing ‘types’ of churches such as AICs or Pentecostals, both because of the blurred boundaries between them and the variety within them (for example Gifford 2004a; Meyer 2004), the tendency—even by the same authors—is to continue to do so, thus upholding the reification of categories some of them seek to deconstruct (see Meyer 2004). Discussion thus remains focussed around denominational discourses, which does not provide space for the recognition of fluidity between different church and non-church groups, nor of the creative and often eclectic ways in which people interpret and negotiate these discourses.

### ***Christianity and culture***

The study of Christianity in Ghana—and in Africa more generally—has been characterised by reference to a range of oppositional categories. The most debated of these have been ‘African/Western’ and ‘traditional/modern’, which have been discussed in the context of missionary activities and encounters; the emergence and establishment of different types of churches; the development of African theologies; and responses of Ghanaians to social and economic change.

Studies of the relationship between Christianity and culture in African contexts have centred around the concept of ‘Africanisation’, or the search for a solution to the problem implied in the history given above: how to be both fully African and fully Christian at the same time, given the domination of the Western world in the twentieth century both over economic and political structures and over Christianity; and its colonial and missionary endeavours and impositions respectively. This has been of particular interest given the recent and increasing popularity of Christianity in Africa (see Table 2.1) juxtaposed with its relative decline in Europe. Many Africans, despite half a century having passed since colonial powers began to withdraw, are apparently embracing what is commonly seen as a Western religion, to the extent that Africans are increasingly travelling as missionaries to the West.

**Table 2.1: Trends in Christianity in Africa, 1800-2000**

Year	Population	No. Christians	% Population	% Global Christianity
1800	107,000,000	4,330,000	4	2.1
1900	133,000,000	8,756,000	6.6	1.6
1970	360,576,942	116,538,000	32.3	9.5
2000	796,598,429	350,091,000	44	17.4

Source: Barrett *et al.* 2008: 30; Geohive 2007a, 2007b

Implicit in the question posed above—how to be fully African and fully Christian at the same time—are two separate categories, ‘Africa’ and ‘Christianity’. The difficulty in answering the question arises because intrinsic to the first category, ‘Africa’, are cultural values and practices bound up with what is commonly known as ‘African traditional religion’, which do not necessarily correspond to or concur with those of conventional Western Christianity.

On a theological level this issue has been tackled by scholars (both African and Western theologians) resisting the requirement for Africans to espouse and submit to European cultural forms in order to worship as Christians, by questioning the relevance of those cultural forms not just for Africans but for Christianity itself. Sanneh (1989) argues that the nature of Christianity as a missionary religion that is translated into the languages of its target groups—as opposed to Islam, which draws its converts to its original Arabic—has led, rather than to Westernisation, to the vernacularisation of Christianity as it is interpreted through the linguistic and cultural terms of local people. Donovan, reflecting on his own experiences of mission work among the Masai in Tanzania, comes to similar conclusions in a normative sense, insisting that missionaries should have “no convictions beyond the one that Christianity is something of value; no preconceived notions about God, salvation, Christ, the meaning of being a Christian, the church, the sacraments, the liturgy, the priesthood, or anything else traditionally associated with Christianity” (Donovan 2004: 1-2). Mbiti (1973), on the other hand, drawing on Niebuhr (1952), sees Christianity as both fulfilling and transforming culture: while culture accommodates Christianity by giving “Christian worship local meaning” through African cultural practices (p.93), Christianity itself remains beyond culture: “the process of transformation means, ultimately that we become more and more Christian and less and less African (or Japanese, American, or Swiss)” (p.94). This tension is

highlighted by Walls, who points to the dual forces of indigenisation, “making Christianity at home in the life of a people: rooting the gospel in its culture, its language, its habits of thought”, and transformation of a church to “standards outside itself—standards which may cut across everyone’s culture pattern” (Walls 1976: 188). More recently, Bediako (1995) asserts that while Mbiti and others have ‘Christianised’ African tradition, “African Christianity must achieve an *Africanisation* of its Christian experience” on an intellectual level rather than purely through indigenising practices, in order to “mend the torn fabric of African identity”, which is “poised between the impact of the West and the pull of its indigenous tradition” (p.4-5).

Social scientists do not seek to resolve the question, but rather to understand how it is played out in society. They thus take as their point of departure changes and trends in the religious landscape and, during the 1960s and 70s, as AICs grew in popularity, the focus of attention rested on these churches. Early works tended to be largely taxonomic, with efforts to develop typologies of African religious movements based on oppositions such as pagan-Christian (Turner 1968), redemptive-therapeutic, instrumental-expressive and traditional-western culture orientation (Fernandez 1964) and types of evil (Wilson 1973). This approach gave way to micro-analytical and historical studies advocating a more grounded and less abstracting level of analysis. The key debate within these studies was between those who took a historical or socio-structural perspective and cultural or symbolic anthropologists. The former analysed religious movements in the context of wider structural shifts, in particular colonialism and the move to independence, tending at first to view the emergence of independent churches purely as nationalistic reactions to colonial oppression (Balandier 1965; Lanternari 1963; Ranger 1968), and later as intrinsic to consciousness and class struggles (Marks and Rathbone 1982; Beinart and Bundy 1986). The latter (especially Fabian 1985; Fernandez 1978) opposed this approach as the inappropriate imposition of Western concepts onto African realities and called for close ethnographic analyses of symbols and cosmologies of religious movements:

Our real enlightenment lies not in the application of imageless ideas exported from the West but in beginning with African images and by a careful method learning what they imply—what is embedded within them. In this approach we may discover other dialectics. (Fernandez 1978: 214-5)

As Ranger documents in his 1986 review of African religious movements and politics, these criticisms led two of the leading proponents of the historical and socio-structural perspective to suggest a synthesis of both approaches:

where so much has been written, in African religious studies, on the structural side, time has come to render the nature of structure both more relative and more dynamic in the light of participants' concrete transactions in concrete situations that have religious relevance. (Van Binsbergen and Schoffeleers 1985: 8, cited in Ranger 1986: 9)

This “unifying project” (Ranger 1986: 12) was also taken up by Karen Fields (1985) in her work on the Watchtower movement in Malawi and Zambia, showing the close relationship between religious symbolism and colonial politics, and by Jean Comaroff, working on the Tshidi of South Africa, who argued that neither of the above approaches was sufficient to provide a full understanding of Tshidi Christian independency:

the forms of social practice that have emerged here are neither the product of global determination alone nor of indigenous cultural structures; rather, [they are] the outcome of a dynamic interaction between the two in a continuing quest for creative action upon the world. And, in order to understand contemporary Tshidi culture in these terms, it is necessary to examine the evolution of their symbolic order in relation to their changing position within the overarching South African social system. (Comaroff 1985: 39-40, cited in Ranger 1986: 11)

The focus of much research into AICs during the 1970s and 1980s was on their relationship with culture and in particular with ‘African traditional religion’. Thus, the second part of *Christianity in Independent Africa* (Fasholé-Luke *et al.* 1978), the result of a conference held in Jos, Nigeria, in 1975, was entitled ‘Traditional Religion and Christianity: Continuities and Conflicts’. Many of the contributions, particularly those by African authors, represent a challenge to the use in Africa of Western forms of Christianity and to “the [missionary] presupposition that African ways were necessarily pagan and had to be done away with” (Opoku 1978: 111). AICs are held up as authentically African expressions of Christianity, “attempts, however crude and

untutored, of the African genius to hold its own, a preserving of the African indigenous understanding of the workings of divinity” (Setiloane 1978: 408).

Meyer, however, in her review of Christianity in Africa since the 1980s, points out that the very search for African authenticity is in itself an essentialist project which upholds the opposition between traditional religion and Christianity, misrepresenting “African religious traditions as static, mission churches as alien(ating), and AICs as syncretically mixing elements from both yet ultimately rooted in and geared toward traditional culture” (Meyer 2004: 454). Drawing on Ranger’s assertion that “we should see mission churches as much less alien and independent churches as much less ‘African’” (Ranger 1987: 31, cited in Meyer 2004: 454-5) along with her own research into grassroots appropriations of Christianity within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana, she argues that, firstly, the notion of Africanisation should not be reserved for the AICs but is also present within other churches, including those of mission origin. Secondly, she takes issue with scholars such as Bediako, who seek to develop Africanisation on a theological level (Bediako 1995), arguing that this makes little sense since ‘real’ Africanisation takes place from below, in the way members of local congregations creatively resist or embrace discourses and practices from both within and without their churches.

Meyer’s dismissal of Africanisation in theology as ‘not needed’ appears to ignore the high levels of respect accorded to church leaders and the tendency of their members to seek their advice and wisdom on a wide range of issues, including those relating to theology and culture. Whether or not Africanisation *should* be “designed from above”, the fact that it is being done so by churches and theologians is not irrelevant but rather constitutes in part exactly that which congregational members negotiate and appropriate. Her wider argument, however, regarding the broadening of the concept of Africanisation to include processes occurring at grassroots level and in churches other than AICs is clearly important and a logical progression in the post-modern era where reifications and oppositions are constantly questioned and deconstructed.

Work examining plural religious fields and the linkages and continuities between different sectors of the Christian landscape had already begun in the 1980s. In his 1986 review Ranger discusses independent churches, traditional religious movements

and mission Christianity in separate sections; however, towards the end of his paper he comments that “it is artificial and distorting to do so”, pointing to MacGaffey’s (1983) study of Kimbanguism in the Belgian Congo and Schoffeleers’ (1984) study of the collapse of the Mbona cult in Malawi “in the face of different kinds of popular religious movement” (Ranger 1986: 49) as examples of research which demonstrate the value of a broader and more integrated approach. However, what has attracted increasing attention in recent years is neither the AICs nor the mission churches, but the explosion of Pentecostalism across the continent.

### ***Pentecostalism and responses to modernity***

The study of Pentecostal churches has opened up a new arena for researchers to explore the relationship between Christianity and culture as well as Africans’ responses to modernity. The more general concept of ‘tradition’ as static was called into question in the 1980s by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), who argue that rather than belonging essentially to the past, tradition is constantly being invented and reinvented as part of the ongoing production of modernity. Researchers of Christianity in Africa (and in Ghana) have drawn on this, Meyer, for example, showing how Ewe ethnic identity was actually affirmed and reified by German Pietist missionaries who promoted the use of their language and cultural practices with the effect of ‘locking them up’ in their own culture and thus subordinating and retaining power over them (Meyer 2002). The new Pentecostal churches, which appear to embrace both modernity and ‘traditional’ cultural cosmologies, provide space for further exploration of the relationship between and the deconstruction of the categories ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’.

As noted above, the term ‘Pentecostal’ is ambiguous in the types of churches it is applied to. Pentecostal churches have only emerged as a separate category distinct from AICs over the past two decades. Opoku, for example, in 1978 described the Musama Disco Christo Church as “one of the oldest Pentecostal churches founded in West Africa” (p.112), and even now the same church belongs to the Pentecostal Council of Ghana although its origins and nature of worship clearly place it as an AIC or ‘spiritual’ church. Meyer (2004) argues that the expansion of ‘Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches’ (she does not distinguish between the older, ‘classical’ Pentecostals such as the Assemblies of God and the newer charismatic churches) has

in effect reconfigured the way that AICs are viewed, polarising what were formerly blurred boundaries. The essential difference lies in the relationship of the churches with the world they exist in—both their local cultural context and the wider world. Whereas AICs are seen as largely local movements rooted in culture and tradition, Pentecostal churches have a global outlook. The origins of many of the latter are in foreign (often Western) networks and societies, by which they are influenced and to which they actively reach out. Most have links with Western, especially American, churches and evangelists; they make extensive use of modern media technologies; they are located mainly in urban centres (although many now have branches multiplying across countries and internationally); their congregations include young people who are (or desire to be) upwardly mobile; and, in Gifford's words, their "Christianity has to do with success, wealth and status" (Gifford 2004a: 44). Meyer strongly asserts their association with modernity as follows:

Many PCCs present themselves as ultimate embodiments of modernity. Building huge churches to accommodate thousands of believers, making use of elaborate technology to organize mass-scale sermons and appearances on TV and radio, organizing spectacular crusades throughout the country—often parading foreign speakers—so as to convert nominal Christians, Muslims, and supporters of traditional religions, creating possibilities for high-quality Gospel Music, and instigating trend-setting modes of dress all create an image of successful mastery of the modern world (de Witte 2003, personal observation; Droz 2001; Hackett 1998). (Meyer 2004: 459)

Some authors, on the other hand, emphasise continuities rather than contrasts between the older AICs and the more recently established Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Anderson remarks, "this newer Pentecostal and Charismatic movement is not fundamentally different from the earlier Holy Spirit movements and so-called 'prophet-healing' and 'spiritual churches' in the African Initiated Churches (AICs), but it is a continuation of them in a very different context" (Anderson 2000: 9). Like Ter Haar, who suggests that "the common thread is a consciousness of the presence of evil, and the need to counter it" (2007: 10), Anderson argues that both these types of churches, as well as the 'classical' Pentecostals,

have all responded to the existential needs of the African worldview. They have all offered a personal encounter with God through the power of the Spirit, healing from sickness and

deliverance from evil in all its manifestations, spiritual, social and structural. (*ibid.* p.9)

Crucial here is the notion of the ‘African worldview’, which involves the concept of “evil in all its manifestations, spiritual, social and structural”. The ‘African worldview’ has often been described as intrinsically spiritual or religious: Mbiti, for example, claims that:

in their traditional life African peoples are deeply religious. It is religion, more than anything else, which colours their understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in that universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe. (Mbiti 1989: 256)

More recently, Ellis and Ter Haar assert that in Africa perceptions of reality are largely understood through a “spirit idiom”: “Spirits—invisible beings that are widely perceived to exist and to influence the material world—are central to the thinking of many millions of people in Africa” (2004: 7-8). I will argue later that Africans themselves do not necessarily think of the world entirely in terms of religion, but it is clear that there is an acute awareness of the presence and power of spiritual forces and beings which has a strong influence on how most people interpret and act in the world. It has been observed by several scholars that Pentecostal churches in Ghana achieve success because they offer their members a way of reaching out to and embracing modernity without requiring a fundamental ontological shift. Larbi (2001b) argues that mission churches were post-enlightenment and rationalistic. They denied the validity of local cosmology and therefore created “two-world Christians” (p.14), who accepted Christianity for its material value but retained spiritual allegiance to what he calls “primal religion”. Ghanaian Pentecostalism, however, has certain continuities with traditional religion and has therefore managed to bridge Christian and primal cosmologies. Larbi identifies in primal (specifically Akan) cosmology a concept of salvation, with a saviour who delivers people from ills and allows them to experience abundant life, that is not unlike the Pentecostal doctrine of salvation. Indeed, he asserts, “there is no essential difference between the two groups’ conception of salvation” (p.10). This is combined with Ghanaian Pentecostalism’s concurrence with the primal religious perception of reality insofar as it acknowledges and engages with the existence of active spiritual forces other than God. Although opposed to primal religion, it



operates within the same discourse and therefore enables Ghanaians to accept Christianity fully without rejecting their basic traditional worldview.

Meyer also portrays Pentecostalism as space through which Ghanaians can negotiate and move between contrasting identities and discourses, although she emphasises the ambivalence of the process in dealing with the conflicts between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’. In her article ‘Make a complete break with the past’, (Meyer 1998a), she identifies the concept of *time* as key to “enabl[ing] pentecostals to draw a rift between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ ‘now’ and ‘then,’ ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ and, of course, ‘God’ and the ‘Devil’” (p.317). The past, she argues, is symbolic in Ghanaian Pentecostal discourse of paganism, bondage and sin, and one must completely sever all links with it in order to be truly liberated in Christ. Other conceptual categories are also implicated in this discourse: the past is associated with traditional religion (and moreover with tradition in general), with the village (as one’s place of origin and the abode of tradition), and with the family (as the keepers of tradition and agents of witchcraft and demonic activity). All this is to be left behind for a modern, urban and individualist lifestyle which, as Meyer highlights, concurs strongly with modernist discourse promoted in Africa through colonisation, missionary activity and the modernisation agenda. However, as she argues in her article, to achieve that rupture is not a simple matter. Since the sources of present troubles may be located in the past, rather than being able to make a clean break once and for all, Christians must continually renounce sinful attitudes and behaviour (both current and past), and identify and break all ancestral curses, occult bondages, links with other religions etc. The paradox is that a break with the past can only be achieved through the act of remembrance: it is necessary to continually remember in order to continually forget. Pentecostal discourse, then, does not simply replace one identity with another. “Rather than exchanging the ‘past’ identity with its emphasis on family ties for a new, individualist identity, it offers members an elaborate discourse and ritual practice to oscillate between both and to address the gap which exists between aspirations and actual circumstances.” (p.340)

Gifford, on the other hand, sees the Pentecostalism of the big charismatic churches in Accra as an obstacle to modernity and development. In his analysis of “Ghana’s New Christianity” (Gifford 2004a) he sets up an opposition between a worldview based on the supernatural and one based on “technical rationality,” which has “gradually

displaced supernatural influence and moral considerations in ever-wider areas of public life, replacing them by considerations of objective performance and practical expediency” (p.190). He goes on to ask “whether a form of religion so manifestly different in its explanatory processes can contribute greatly to the rationality that the modern world introduced and seemingly requires” (p.190). In Gifford’s opinion, charismatic Christianity is not conducive to the modernist agenda, but reinforces the supernatural worldview through its emphasis on spiritual forces, blurring the boundaries between the modern, public and secular, and the traditional, private and religious. Because most of the charismatic sector attributes spiritual causality to existential problems, it also demands spiritual solutions: exorcism and prayer, for instance, but not economic reform or welfare provision. Although there is a strong emphasis on achieving material and social success, this success is seen as the Christian’s birthright and therefore to be achieved through faith. Aspirations in all areas of life, particularly health, prosperity and status, are based on a particular interpretation of the Bible: “Ignore your situation; you must rather believe what the Bible says” (p.71). Gifford presents this as the Bible being privileged over one’s circumstances, which are denied. He quotes one pastor: “If I were to ask my body, it would say “You are sick”, but if I were to ask the Word, it would always tell you that “by his stripes you are healed”. Who are you going to believe?” (p.71), and describes another’s distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘truth’: “Some things are real but not true. Reality is not the truth. ... The fact on the ground is that you have no money, but the Bible says, “My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory”... Maybe the doctor says you are too old to have a child... but my Bible says “None shall be barren”” (p.72). Since there is such emphasis on success and victory, “negative realities can only be rejected” (p.52). This approach does not permit any engagement with problems: its way of resolving them is to deny their legitimate existence.

Gifford argues that charismatic churches “flourish mainly because they claim to have the answers to Ghanaians’ existential problems” (2004a: ix). Although he places the emphasis firmly on “their most pressing existential problem, economic survival” (*ibid.*: ix), other authors highlight a far wider range of issues:

Suplicants’ [at Pentecostal prayer camps] concerns include the need for healing; financial and economic problems; problems relating to marriages, children, employment, family needs; some go

there because of lawsuits; others go there because they are struggling with drunkenness and they want to overcome it; some go there because of educational issues; they go there because of accommodation needs: a place to lay their heads; some go there because of the problem of bad or frightful dreams; some have problems with demonic and witchcraft attacks; others go there because of social expectations, particularly the need to provide for their families. (Larbi 2001b: 7)

Hawkins (1997), writing about mass conversion in the 1930s, indicates the provision of medicine by missionaries as a reason for high conversion rates, but also a view of the missionaries as an alternative—and preferable—source of authority to the colonial administration. Other authors, writing about more recent times, relate existential concerns to the era of modernity: De Witte, for example, argues that a message of hope is particularly pertinent in “these ‘Hipik-times’<sup>5</sup>, with their high rate of unemployment also among the educated and a general feeling of lack of improvement” (2003a: 193-4). Meyer argues that Pentecostal churches offer a way out of inhibiting social structures: “these churches are most attractive to people who attempt to move upward economically, mainly by business and trade, yet have relatively little to say in the male-oriented gerontocratic power structure which still is of great importance in Ghanaian society. ... The pentecostalist churches offer them a new individualist ethics which matches their aspirations to achieve power and esteem irrespective of age and origin” (1998a: 320). What all agree on is that a major attraction of Christianity is its perceived relevance to people’s situations: two main responses to a survey of why people patronise churches are that the preachers “relate to you” and “it looks as if they can read your mind and through that solve your problems” (Sackey 2001: 48). Moreover, within this literature authors repeatedly find that far more importance is placed on life in this world than on life after death. Van der Geest, for instance, researching the views of older people about death, found that “[i]n most cases, ‘life after death’ was understood in terms of ‘this world’: the lives of those who stayed behind after the death of the deceased” (2002: 24).

The emphasis on the existential conflicts somewhat with the more abstract and theological explanations for the growth of Pentecostalism given by Larbi and Meyer, based on its links with traditional African religious worldviews. As outlined above,

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<sup>5</sup> “Hipik” is the street term for HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Country), a status assigned to Ghana by the IMF/World Bank with the aim of obtaining macroeconomic reform and stability through structural adjustment policies. The completion point of this scheme was reached in 2004.

Larbi argues that Pentecostalism has been successful in Ghana due to the continuities between its doctrines and primal African cosmology. Ghanaians do not have to renounce their traditional worldview in order to embrace Christianity fully, and although initially attracted by existential problems they move on to “fully [appreciate] and [embrace] teachings on the original sin and the atonement” (2001b: 9). This argument, however, is challenged by Hawkins, who maintains that “history is more important to understanding conversion among the LoDagaa than theology” (1997: 54), since people are far more concerned with everyday existential threats than with abstract theological notions.

The division between experiential and intellectual/theological is not clear cut. One of the main differences between Christianity and ‘primal’ African cosmology, as set out by Larbi, is that whereas Christianity is primarily concerned with salvation in the afterlife, primal religion relates “solely to the here and now”, with “no concept of heaven tomorrow” (2001b: 9). Despite this incongruity, Pentecostalism still achieves a great deal of success, and Larbi argues that this is because it is dual-faceted: “when the Pentecostals talk of ‘salvation’, they are talking primarily in terms of the atonement, forgiveness of sin, and reconciliation with God, yet by their practices, they are reaching out to things that go beyond the ‘born again’ experience, to an experience that permeates their here and now life”. Indeed, “the concept of salvation cannot be divorced from their existential needs” (p.7). In fact, in starting from the premise that Christianity concerns itself predominantly with salvation and the hereafter, Larbi neglects to recognise the multiplicity and complexity of concerns encapsulated within the Christian world as a whole and within each denomination and church. Pentecostalism is not the only sector of Christianity to emphasise matters of ‘this world’, and use of the term ‘Christianity’ in this way abstracts it from any particular context, reifying and essentialising it as a religious discourse.

Here we see a fundamental intertwining of the categories ‘physical’ and ‘spiritual’ that have often been separated in Western social science. This does not necessarily entail a predominance of one over the other: while spiritual causes are often attributed to illness, financial difficulties and other problems, spiritual matters—and beings—are often very much grounded in physical life. There is not, then, an overriding concern with abstract theological or ‘spiritual’ matters as suggested by scholars such as Mbiti (1989). As Hawkins argues regarding the LoDagaa people,

“Christian doctrine did represent a sudden and dramatic break with indigenous beliefs, but converts did not experience evangelization at a doctrinal level, but at an experiential level, where political and existential concerns were more important” (1997: 78-9). Thus, Larbi and Hawkins are arguing against each other over the importance of conceptual or doctrinal similarities and differences to the growth of Christianity, however, their arguments converge on the notion that ‘[t]he concept of salvation... [is] not based on abstract notions, but on the immediate existential threats of everyday life’ (Hawkins 1997: 70), precisely because the theological and the existential cannot be separated.

### ***Summary of Part 1 and the question of religion***

The paragraphs above have shown that Christianity in (southern) Ghana is pervasive and very visible. There is a multitude of different churches and Christian movements which, for the sake of convenience, are usually categorised into groups based on their origins, organisation, teachings and style of worship. Academic discussion tends to use such typologies as the analytical framework through which to approach the subject of Christianity in Ghana, often focussing on one particular sector such as the mission churches, the AICs or the Pentecostal-charismatic churches. Key debates relating to the latter two groups respectively are the notion of Africanisation—the extent to which Christianity and African culture can be reconciled—and the concept of modernity and how far churches provide space for this to be negotiated. While AICs have been assessed as indigenising Christianity through the application of local symbols and practices, often resulting in syncretistic religion, Pentecostals are viewed as embracing the economic opportunities of modernity while operating within the same spiritual discourse as traditional religion.

Within all of this, certain oppositional analytical categories can be identified. ‘Africa’ and ‘Christianity’ are reified in opposition to each other, as are ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. There is also a tendency to separate out the ‘physical’ and the ‘spiritual’, or the ‘existential’ and the ‘theological’. In reality none of these categories, nor those dividing different churches, are discrete or distinct and it is essential not only to acknowledge the continuities between them, but to recognise them as artificial constructs that may not be appropriate in this particular context. Underlying this discussion is debate over another category which fundamentally

informs analyses of African society. *Religion* is often held up as the lens through which it is possible to understand social phenomena in Africa: authors such as Mbiti (1989) and Ellis & Ter Haar (2004) assert that for most Africans reality is interpreted in religious terms. Green, on the other hand, disputes this claim, arguing that religion should be kept in its place as a social and analytical category, rather than being used as an explanatory framework for all social practice. Not all Africans see the world entirely in religious terms, and privileging religion in Africa serves not only to diminish the importance of other social forces (for example politics, power structures and resources), but also to reify the sense of Africa as ‘Other’ (Green 2006). However, to go too far in this direction, to compartmentalise life and relegate religion to the ‘private’ and ‘sacred’ as opposed to the ‘public’ and ‘secular’, would be to disregard the continuities between these domains and the role of the spiritual and of religion in many areas of life. Perhaps instead of debating how far Africans see the world as ‘religious’, the term ‘religion’ itself must be questioned as a category constructed in a political, economic and social context very different from that to which it is applied in contemporary Africa—as Green insists. What Western social science denotes as ‘religious’ may not be interpreted in the same way by Ghanaians. The terms ‘spiritual’ and ‘religious’, for example, are not synonymous: everything relating to the spiritual is not necessarily considered religious, and *vice versa*. This, of course, may also be the case in Western society, but in social science analyses of Africa (particularly within development studies) the two categories tend to be collapsed.

## **Part 2: Negotiating Culture and Modernity in Everyday Life**

Having reviewed debates around the issues of culture and modernity within the study of Christianity in Ghana, I now switch perspective to examine how literature from outside this subject area can throw light onto the ways in which religion is played out in people’s everyday lives.

## ***Culture and cosmology***

We have seen that the search for ‘authentically African’ Christianity has been challenged by resistance to the essentialist implications this has in relation to African culture and ‘traditional religion’. The current predominant school of thought within cultural studies argues that culture is not static and discrete, but rather fluid and dynamic, with customs and traditions being continually adapted according to new circumstances (Hall & du Gay 1996; Rutherford 1990). It is therefore impossible to talk of an essentially African, Western, or even British, Yoruba or Ahanta culture, since this would mean freezing it at a particular moment in time, attempting artificially to separate out the ‘authentic’ from outside influences, without recognising that no such authenticity can ever be reached because the culture has always been in a continuous state of continuity and change. The situation is further complicated by the common lack of separation between ethnic groups: although it is convenient to speak of the Ga tribe as distinct from the Nzemas or the Asantes or the Fantes, in any one medium-sized town in Ghana one is likely to find members of each of these groups living side by side with each other, intermarrying and sharing cultural practices and values. Although there may be a strong sense of identification with ethnic labels, they do not constitute orderly and timeless systems in which all parts are mutually consistent and based on the same underlying principles. In effect, ‘Ahanta culture’ exists only in a state of continual change, temporally, spatially and socially.

The existence of underlying principles on which values and actions are based is not necessarily, however, an important concern for the people doing the valuing and the acting. Having described the scene at his sister’s Methodist wedding in Kumasi, where the pouring of libation to the family ancestors follows the prayers of a Catholic archbishop, Appiah asks:

What are we to make of all this? Or rather, what are Europeans and Americans to make of it, since it is all so familiar to me—to most contemporary Africans—that I find it hard to recover the sense of contradiction between the elements of this no-doubt remarkable ‘syncretism.’ (Appiah 1992: 120)

Thus, when people act or relate in certain ways they are often not concerned with theology or cultural integrity. Meanings of actions change, indeed meaning is not

always consciously attributed or even necessary: “that is how it is done” is enough. A family friend related to me that his wife once asked him why he always cut the ends off a joint of meat before roasting it. He answered that that was what he had learnt from his mother and, on questioning the latter, he discovered that she had been taught the technique by her own mother. When he asked his grandmother the same question she replied that the reason she cut the ends off the meat was that her oven was too small to fit in a whole joint. This does not imply that people do not know why they themselves perform certain actions: they may not know why the actions were originally performed but they have their own reasons, which may be very different.

That actions do not necessarily reflect full acceptance of or adherence to the ideologies or intellectual principles with which they are often associated is an insight familiar to medical anthropologists, particularly those working in the interpretive tradition which sees illness representations as culturally constituted realities rather than as folk beliefs (as do empiricists) or as cognitive models (see Good 1994: 37-64 for a detailed discussion of these competing orientations within medical anthropology). As Lock and Nichter note with reference to the special issue of *Social Science and Medicine* entitled ‘Medical Pluralism in World Perspective’ (Leslie 1980), “patients are, almost without exception, pragmatic, and see nothing inconsistent about liberally combining different forms of therapy in their quest for restored health” (2002: 4). Brodwin, researching medical pluralism in Haiti, asserts that “[r]eligious affiliation emerges from people’s response to bodily and social affliction, not their cognitive acceptance of a set of cosmic principles or abstract propositions about good and evil” (1996: 18). He demonstrates how people continually renegotiate their position in relation to different religions and medical systems, in the face of the trials and challenges they encounter in everyday life and at crisis points; but this happens on an intrinsically pragmatic level which allows them to move between systems without assuming their ideological bases. Thus, “[r]esidents of Jeanty draw freely on biomedical symbols and therapies without accepting its naturalistic ideology (the materialist, secular notion that removes illness from the realm of misfortune, social relations, or moral concerns)” (p.77). A similar observation is emphasised by Last in his study of medical cultures in Hausaland: “People do not, in my experience, face intellectual problems in embarking on the appropriate method of treatment ... there are many more pressing, practical problems



with which to cope” (Last 1992: 403). Last suggests that, in line with this pragmatism, in many cases traditional medical ‘systems’ may be better referred to as ‘non-systems’, as they do not “adhere to a single consistent theory of logic” (p.398), but have over time been so influenced and affected by each other and by ‘non-traditional’ systems such as Islam and biomedicine that any system that previously existed has fragmented: “for traditional medicine to have a single comprehensive theory to account for all illness is out of the question. But it seems that even a coherent set of ideas, embedded in the language or implicit in people’s actions, has now disappeared” (p.399).

Last implies that, although people do not now think in terms of a coherent system, this is due to the introduction and impact of other theories of logic and that in the past a “coherent set of ideas” did exist. This analysis has modernist undertones, suggesting an essentialised, traditional ‘past’ from which societies move on. Such a discrete and coherent cosmology, however, may never have existed. Returning to the study of religion in Africa, Brenner (1989) asserts that although in academic studies religious knowledge is privileged over religious participation, in reality in Africa participation precedes and is more widely available than knowledge, which is often esoteric, possessed exclusively by priests and elders. Most people do not start with an awareness of a coherent cosmology—whether or not one exists—and act accordingly; rather, they start with practice, participating in ritual or reacting to situations, and their conceptual universe is constructed around this. There is thus not only space for a great deal of variation and eclecticism in explanations of events and occurrences, but also considerable scope for religious and intellectual creativity (Brenner 1989: 91). On the other hand, to privilege embodied participation and practice too much can imply that people are not capable of cognitive thought and risks endorsing racial stereotypes of Africans as primarily bodily beings while Westerners are intellectually oriented. Mind and body are, of course, fundamentally linked and even if practice precedes and is privileged over knowledge, it only occurs within a normative context informed by knowledge, however subconsciously. In the context of churches where knowledge is not entirely esoteric and is passed on and reconstructed through sermons, discussions and Bible studies, it is important not to ignore doctrines and teachings as well as how these are received, interpreted and acted upon.

## ***Managing modernity***

The field of medical anthropology also holds parallels with another aspect of religion: its stubborn refusal to die out. Despite modernist assumptions to the contrary, biomedicine has not become standardised across the globe in replacing all other medical systems. Sociological perspectives question the pure objectivity and rationality of scientific knowledge itself and, as Lock and Nichter (2002) point out, plurality and complementarity remain the norm. Referring mainly to Leslie and Young's *Paths to Asian Medical Knowledge* (1992), they state:

The presumption of so many intellectuals and medical professionals throughout the second half of the last century that, with 'modernization' and 'westernization', a scientific medicine would fully emerge, one that is, in effect, epistemologically free and corresponds closely with reality, is rigorously challenged ... Similarly, the idea that people everywhere, once exposed to modernization and a modicum of scientific knowledge, would rescind on 'tradition' and resort only to 'modern' medicine is refuted. (Lock and Nichter 2002: 4)

Likewise, secular and atheistic ideologies have not come anywhere near to replacing religion and 'the spiritual' as the basis of the worldview of the majority of the world's population (see Chapter 1 pp.13-15). In Africa Christianity, a universalist religion, has dramatically increased in numbers of adherents over the course of the modern era; so too have reports of other spiritual phenomena, not least witchcraft.

Witchcraft in Africa is not of necessity studied in terms of religion and where the connection is made it is usually oppositional, in the context of studies highlighting, for example, 'deliverance' doctrines and activities of churches (Gifford 2004a; Hackett 2003; Meyer 1998b). Indeed, witchcraft and magic are as strongly associated in history with science (for example alchemy and astrology) as with religion (see Thomas 1971, ch.22, pp.641-668). In the early twentieth century witchcraft was associated by academics with 'pre-logic' (Lévy-Bruhl 1926) and tradition, based on the Enlightenment notions of progress and modernisation that saw all societies as moving in a linear fashion from the primitive to the modern. According to this thesis, contemporary witchcraft in Africa was a simple reflection of the same stage reached by European countries in the seventeenth century and earlier, and would eventually be replaced by rational logic. Evans-Pritchard, however, in his *Witchcraft, Oracles*

*and Magic among the Azande* (1937), argued that Azande witchcraft beliefs were extremely logical and rational within the premises on which they were based (although those premises themselves might be misinformed). In the 1950s and 60s structural-functionalists such as Gluckman (1956), Middleton (1960) and Turner (1957) connected witchcraft with social change, portraying it as a way of managing tensions, and as far back as 1935, Audrey Richards linked the phenomenon with changes such as colonialism, migration, Christianity, wage labour and urbanisation (Richards 1935). Thus, witchcraft has long been disassociated with tradition and 'primitive' thinking and associated with social upheaval and modernity. Witchcraft's relationship to and place within modernity have continued to be the focus of the expanding body of research published over the past two decades (Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998), with the twist that "[c]ontemporary scholars of witchcraft cast occult beliefs and practices as not only contiguous with, but constitutive of modernity" (Moore & Sanders 2001: 11-12). As authors have begun to speak of 'modernities' rather than one unifying 'modernity' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993a), the term 'witchcraft' has broadened, referring to different beliefs and practices in specific contexts, but also associated with far-reaching forces and phenomena of globalisation. This is exemplified by Comaroff and Comaroff's (1993b) edited volume, *Modernity and its Malcontents*, the second half of which is entitled 'Moral economics, modern politics, mystical struggles' and devoted to essays on African witchcraft in various forms and locations.

The reason for the recent heightened interest in witchcraft and modernity is that reports of witchcraft have been increasing over the past few decades with the onset of modernity, rather than decreasing as modernists might have expected. Ciekawy and Geschiere note:

throughout the postcolonial period the influence of witchcraft discourse has become increasingly manifest, precisely in modern sectors of society including politics, sports, new forms of entrepreneurship, and institutions of formal education. (1998: 1)

Incidents of witchcraft reports, accusations and their often violent consequences have become so common in Africa that much recent literature frames the subject in terms of its "containment", emphasising both the rapid increase and the frightening nature of witchcraft for those concerned (Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998: 3), or as a human

rights issue, focussing on the violence done to those accused of acting as witches (Ter Haar 2007). Underlying these and other approaches is the question of the nature of the relationship between witchcraft and modernity: why is witchcraft increasing, and why should the two be linked?

Two main themes that anthropologists connect with witchcraft are insecurity and power. One of the characteristics of modernity is the opening up and meeting of new and different markets, political systems, cultures and technologies: people are required to negotiate undefined foreign powers, global capitalism, international and state politics, hi-tech communications and transport. There are new opportunities for the creation of wealth and new frustrations for those who cannot take advantage of them. As Comaroff and Comaroff assert,

the signs and practices of witchcraft are integral to the experience of the contemporary world. They are called on to counter the magic of modernity. And to act upon the elusive effects of transnational forces—especially as they come to be embodied in the all-too-physical forms of their local beneficiaries. (1993a: xxv)

In the face of a pluralistic, non-coherent and rapidly changing society, where people live in a nexus of many different—often discordant—ideas, values and practices (Olivier de Sardan 1999; Ashforth 1998), witches, who act and interact with unseen powers, constitute a very plausible interpretive framework. Ashforth, writing on spiritual insecurity in Soweto, suggests that “things like the very real fear of things such as witchcraft, giant snakes, or the Devil can arise from the potent interplay of plausibility and doubt” (1998: 64). In Nigeria, Bastian (1993) highlights the way that tensions based on the exploitation and expropriation of resources both between indigenous residents and non-indigenous residents, and between resident indigenes and non-resident indigenes of villages are often constructed in terms of witchcraft. From the rural perspective city-dwellers resemble witches in their separation from the village community, their unregulated accumulation of wealth and their association with cities which continually draw resources from rural areas in order to survive. From the urban perspective, on the other hand, the village is the abode of witchcraft and rural residents act as such when they accept money from urban relations while refusing them full status in the community.

Belonging to a community is important. Olivier de Sardan (1999), seeking to understand the underlying causes of corruption in Africa, highlights “the logics of the solidarity network” as one of several contributory factors. He argues that such networks are not only considerably more extended in Africa than in Europe, but also far more exigent in terms of mutual obligation:

Each individual is integrated into various networks, each of which entails solidarities and therefore corresponding pressures. The problem is that the solidarity exacted by the network is so rigorous that anyone who fails to respect his obligations to a member of one of the networks to which he belongs suffers reproach, and becomes the object of considerable and sustained pressure from all members of the network. Should he persist, he becomes the cause of scandal, and his reputation soon becomes detestable. (p.41)

Another factor emphasised by Olivier de Sardan is “the logics of redistributive accumulation”, whereby accumulation of wealth *to be placed at the disposal of one’s family* is valued and seen as a responsibility for those who have such an opportunity. There is pressure not only to prosper as much as possible, but also to redistribute one’s resources (primarily to one’s relatives): the perceived failure to conform to this obligation constitutes one of the bases for the invocation of witchcraft discourses in Bastian’s study (1993: 141-2).

For many Africans wealth can be reckoned in spiritual as well as material terms (*ibid.*: 140; see also Ellis & Ter Haar 2004), with age, knowledge, title, office, health and prosperity all acting as indicators of spiritual wealth. Bastian emphasises that spiritual wealth is “inherent in communal recognition and appreciation” (1993: 140), so the reason why urban residents in Nigeria see the simultaneous acceptance of their money and denial of full status in their village community as tantamount to witchcraft is that an inability to participate fully in the community—which extends beyond the physically living to the ancestors—means that “the nonresident cannot complete the normal process of his or her life. It is as if a witch had eaten his or her heart” (p.137).

To be seen as spiritually wealthy is desirable, not only because it brings power, status and material benefits in society, but also because it implies to others that one has access to high levels of spiritual power: as Ellis and Ter Haar remark, success is its

own justification (2004: 155). However, success can also be damning: spiritual wealth may come from good sources (God), but it may equally derive from evil sources. Thus, witches are considered spiritually wealthy but evil and dangerous, as are those who practise *juju* for immoral or individualistic purposes. Conversely, those who have acquired material wealth or positions of power are often suspected of doing so through evil spiritual means (this is a recurrent theme in the Nigerian film industry as well as among political commentators in the Ghanaian press). Church leaders are not exempt from this ambivalence: although usually respected as ‘men (and women) of God’, it is not uncommon for them to face accusations of occult practices (Hackett 2003: 67-8).

From a psychological perspective, Adams argues that in Ghana a particular model of relationship predominates which he calls “interdependent selfways” (as opposed to “independent selfways” common in North America), which promotes objective self-awareness, a sense of openness to interpersonal influence and an experience of relationship as an inevitable fact of social life rather than created through effort or by discretion (Adams 2005: 951). This outlook helps to engender a pervasive and underlying sense of enemyship as a social norm: potential enemies are everywhere, and even if there has been no experience of overt hatred the existence of unidentified enemies is assumed. Nobody can be fully trusted. On the other hand, precisely this sense of interdependence also means that other people *must* be trusted, since one is always reliant on others not only for spiritual wealth, but also for material resources. The resulting ambivalent nature of relationships fosters conditions of uncertainty and doubt which, as we have seen, constitute fertile ground for witchcraft suspicions and accusations. The family is the primary (although not the sole) source of resources and the centre of binding loyalties and responsibilities. Although Olivier de Sardan argues that solidarity networks include relationships far beyond the family, such as peer groups, colleagues, neighbours, co-members of churches, confraternities and political parties, he recognises that the family is, “as we all know, widely extended and replete with pressures and solicitations which can hardly be ignored” (1999: 40). The family is thus also the sphere with most potential for witchcraft suspicions. As is commonly noted by scholars, witchcraft in Africa is most strongly linked to the family and the home (Akrong 2007: 57; Bastian 1993: 134; Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998: 4; Ter Haar 2007: 16), “epitomiz[ing] the frightening realization that there is

jealousy and aggression within the intimate circle of the family where only solidarity and trust should reign” (Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998: 4).

People thus live their lives in the context of ambivalent relationships which are—at least in part—worked out with reference to spiritual power. Members of churches do not separate out these relationships from their ‘church life’; nor do the discourses and teachings of their church overrule their cultural sense of relatedness. Rather, they bring this relatedness with them into church services; it affects the way religious discourses are constructed and interpreted as well as being affected itself by those discourses; and church communities themselves are subject to—albeit with some negotiation—the underlying logics and values governing all relationships in Ghanaian society.

### ***Summary of Part 2: Culture and modernity in everyday life***

Everyday life in Ghana is not a matter of living day by day within an orderly and unified cosmological system with fixed rules and practices and clearly defined roles and relationships. As takes place throughout the world, the cosmology in which people live is continually constructed and reconstructed in response to ever-changing social, economic, political and environmental conditions. For most it consists of an apparently eclectic mixture of different socio-religious discourses, each of which is also, of course, in a continuous state of change. Rather than designing one’s actions and interactions to fit with a preconceived cosmological order, many people act in a far more pragmatic manner, where practice sets the grounds for knowledge and underlying or ‘original’ meanings of actions and practices are less important than their immediate relevance to one’s current situation.

In the context of modernity, with its mobility, potential opportunities and frustrations as well as heightened contact with diverse ideas and value systems, the notion of ‘order’ becomes ever more elusive. Relationships are essential for both protection and progress—and indeed, relatedness as the state of being in relationship with others is inescapable. But relationships are also ambivalent, holding the potential for harm as well as for good, and in managing this ambivalence and insecurity people may draw on spiritual discourses and practices such as witchcraft fears and accusations.

## Conclusion

Literature on Christianity in Ghana is largely characterised by divisions and oppositions, between types of churches (mission, African indigenous, Pentecostal-charismatic) and between conceptual categories (traditional-modern, physical-spiritual, experiential-theological). While AICs are generally assessed in relation to Ghanaian culture, Pentecostal churches are evaluated in terms of modernity. However, insights from other bodies of literature—related to African studies, medical anthropology and witchcraft studies—raise profound challenges to these forms of categorical divisions. Cultural ‘systems’ are in fact not systems: there is no clearly defined, coherent cosmology that governs people’s lives. Rather, modernity—which is part of and which encompasses culture—is marked by fluidity, multiplicity and uncertainty, and relationships are insecure and ambivalent. Religious discourses are not relegated to the ‘past’ or ‘tradition’, but are drawn on in continually changing ways as people seek to manage modern life. Moreover, the concept of ‘religion’ itself is called into question. In managing modernity discourses themselves are not what preoccupy people: pragmatism is more important, and in religion practice is privileged over knowledge. The later part of this thesis explores how this is played out in the lives of members of two congregations in a village in southern Ghana.



## Methodology

### Introduction

*Sitting here in my room in Ndwumizili, sometimes I wonder how I got here, how I came from a country 3,000 miles away to be typing at my computer in these particular four square feet of floor space, out of all the other billions in the world. I could so easily be occupying a different space in a different room in a different village in a different country. Presumably I could have chosen virtually any location in West Africa, carried out similar fieldwork techniques and come up with not the same (perhaps not even similar) findings, but valid findings all the same. My research would have taken different directions and my thesis would no doubt look entirely different, but then those four square feet of space would be the ones I would be sitting in, the reality I would be living, and these would be just part of the billions that I didn't end up in and therefore didn't know existed.*

Journal, September 2006

I arrived at the place where I was—and have arrived at the place where I am now—through a mixture of intelligent reasoning, intuitive decision-making and practical circumstances beyond my control, and this process is what I reflect on in this chapter. I set out the development of the research question and the design of the research, the rationale behind the location of the study, an overview of methods used, a discussion of the significance of relationships within the field, ethical considerations in participant observation, and the analysis and narrative of the research. Throughout, I demonstrate how the process of research is one of continual negotiation: firstly, negotiating the research question; secondly, negotiating the data collection; and finally, negotiating the data analysis and narrative.

## Part 1: Negotiating the Research Question

### *Development of the research question*

When you stand on the edge of a village and watch the noise and motion, you wonder, 'Who are all the people and what are they doing?' ... you need to learn about a world you don't understand by encountering it firsthand and making some sense out of it. (Agar 1986: 12, cited in Silverman 2006: 65)

When I started my fieldwork I did not feel ready. Because, according to a deep-seated conviction that I have observed in others as well as myself which is no doubt partly born from an instinctive fear of the unknown, to do fieldwork you need a plan. A detailed plan, specifying for the entire period precisely which questions you will ask to which people on which day at which exact location, giving which results for which reasons. Several people horrified me by asking before I left what conclusions I thought my research would lead to. However, I eventually left and boarded a plane to Ghana to research how people encounter and interact with Christianity, knowing only where I would spend the first few nights.

The details of my research were not all planned out in detail from the beginning and, as an ethnographic study, nor could they be, especially not from a different continent, having never visited the country in question. Burgess suggests that even the moment of beginning of the research is ambiguous, arguing that "the relationship between the sociological training of researchers and their personal experiences in a social setting ... may help to generate a research problem and a programme of research" (1984: 32). Malinowski refers to the issues brought into the field from a researcher's pre-fieldwork theoretical studies as "foreshadowed problems", calling them the "main endowment of a scientific thinker" (1922: 9, cited in Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 25), a concept that is expanded by Hammersley and Atkinson, who identify stimuli such as a "surprising fact", "social events", "chance encounters or personal experiences", all of which can form the starting point of a research problem. They qualify this, stating that "experiences prior to entering the field must be subjected to analytic reflection. Experiences are rendered interesting or significant by theoretical ideas: the stimulus is not intrinsic to the experiences themselves" (1995: 29). I knew from my own experiences what I had found interesting when I had lived in

neighbouring Togo a few years previously and subsequently returned to research my Masters dissertation; I knew from reading literature what others had found interesting in Ghana and other African countries, and all of this, along with other life experiences, shaped my research up until I left to start my fieldwork. But how all this would play out in the field, I could not begin to know until I arrived.

In most qualitative research the development of the research question, the research design, the collection of data, the analysis and the writing-up are not clearly distinguished or continuous processes (Bryman & Burgess 1994: 217); rather, they happen simultaneously and in constant negotiation, with the focus at times on one, at times on another. As Burgess writes elsewhere, “social research is not just a question of neat procedures but a social process whereby interaction between researcher and researched will directly influence the course which a research programme takes ... Accordingly the project, and the methodology, is continually defined and redefined” (1984: 31). Such was the case in this study, where the design of the research—within broad parameters—developed and was continually adapted through ongoing analysis during the fieldwork, and where writing formed an integral part of the data and analysis as well as the final presentation of the thesis. The research question (above) then, started deliberately broad in scope, informed by knowledge from literature and experience, but not constrained from being responsive to themes arising from the ground.

Themes started arising as soon as I arrived. Many of the people I spoke to about my research (often representing organisations<sup>6</sup>) had ideas and opinions about issues that they saw as important. Moreover, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling life in Ghana threw up numerous different directions that the research could take. I had to negotiate these possibilities, exploring them and identifying which I wanted to follow up because, as Stake points out, “[m]any a researcher would like to tell the whole story but of course cannot; the whole story exceeds anyone’s knowing, anyone’s telling” (2003: 144). Indeed, from a social constructivist view it is questionable as to whether there is actually a “whole story”, since reality differs according to perspective rather than existing independently from our interpretation (see for

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<sup>6</sup> The two organisations with which I had most contact were the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT), and the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology (ACMC).

example Potter 1996; Walsh 1972). Hammersley and Atkinson call the process of narrowing down the research topic “funnelling”:

Ethnographic research should have a characteristic ‘funnel’ structure, being progressively focused over its course. Over time the research problem needs to be developed or transformed, and eventually its scope is clarified and delimited, and its internal structure explored. In this sense, it is frequently well into the process of inquiry that one discovers what the research is *really* about; and not uncommonly it turns out to be about something rather different from the initial foreshadowed problems. (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 206)

In this research the central aim has remained the same throughout: to study religion on an everyday rather than an institutional level in order to better understand its relevance to the reality of daily life (see Chapter 1 pp.21-22). The focus, however, was gradually narrowed down, first to a rural community, later to two specific churches, as the nature of everyday religion unfolded. The research question crystallised within the tension between my own ideas, interests, experience and agenda, and the nature of the field itself, on a practical as well as a conceptual level.

## ***Research design***

Above I describe the process of the development of the research question as occurring simultaneously and in constant negotiation with the research design, collection of data, analysis and writing-up. However, this is not to say that exactly the same processes are occurring all the way through qualitative research, nor does it mean that research can be completely unstructured (Silverman 2006: 80). Janesick likens qualitative research design to choreography, pointing out that “the qualitative researcher, like the choreographer, follows set routines ... as well as improvisational moments” (2003: 52). She identifies three general stages of design decisions (see pp.53-62). First, “the warm-up, preparation, or prechoreographic stage” (p.52), which includes decisions regarding: guiding questions; site and participant selection; gaining access; research timeline; selection of research strategies; the place of theory; identification of the researcher’s own beliefs and ideology; ethical issues and willingness to deal with these as they present themselves. Second, “the exploration or tryout and total workout stage” (p.52), which occurs during data collection in the field, includes “stretching exercises” (p.58) (others would say piloting) and

background work, and during which multiple adjustments are continually made. Third, “the cooling down, illumination and formulation or completion stage” (p.61), decisions made at the end of the study, on leaving the field.

Janesick equates these stages with pre-fieldwork, fieldwork, and post-fieldwork periods of research. However, sometimes they do not correspond, especially when the fieldwork takes place in a distant location. Thus, the “warm-up” stage of my research continued into the first half of the fieldwork, including site selection, language-learning, profiling and contextualisation. Since my language training took place entirely in the field, Ahanta being a minority, localised language with no formal learning materials, this phase occurred simultaneously with a period of familiarisation and integration, on cultural, spatial, social and personal levels. The language-learning itself phased out gradually as data collection gathered momentum, but it was during this time that I gathered the necessary information with which to make decisions regarding the location and direction of the research as well as strategies, methods and access. Many of these decisions were made during a consolidatory two months spent in the UK at the end of this period. Janesick’s second stage of exploration and workout therefore merged with the warm-up stage, but was concentrated more in the second half of the fieldwork, February to October 2006. The line between the second and third stages fell roughly at the moment of finishing data collection and starting final analysis and writing in the UK. However, preliminary analysis and categorisation had been taking place over the course of the entire fieldwork period, writing had begun and the remains of interview transcripts were yet to be completed.

## **Part 2: Negotiating Data Collection**

### ***Site selection***

This is a study of a village in south-western Ghana. I chose Ghana as the location for my research for several reasons. I already had experience of working in a West African country, Togo, from where my interest in African Christianity stemmed, but was reluctant to return to the same organisational context in a research role. Ghana boasted a far more established academic scene than Togo, including a research centre focused on African Christianity. Moreover, English, my own mother tongue, is an

official language of Ghana, especially significant as I knew I would be learning a Ghanaian language from scratch.

Access to the village was obtained through the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT), which has a language project based there. As a village it provided nice boundaries for my study, including a mixture of churches of different denominations, and (as I thought) the dominant Ahanta culture allowed the relationship between Christianity and culture to be examined more clearly. My decision was also strongly influenced by the practical and methodological considerations of independence and exposure. It was clear that the village option would give me by far the most exposure to the lives of local people. Not only would I not have an institution either to hinder me or for me to hide behind<sup>7</sup>, but in lodging with a family I would be living closely with residents of the village, which would better enable me to integrate into the community and to observe everyday life. In retrospect it is possible to trace the dynamic between the method and the direction of the research: having chosen the case study location with the aim of getting close to participants' daily lives, the everyday became increasingly important because of the types of data I was exposed to.

## ***Overview of methods***

Aiming to explore how religion is played out in everyday life, my fieldwork was ethnographic in nature and centred around observational methods, both participant and non-participant. Secondary to this were different kinds of interviews. Through these methods an assortment of different types of data were collected, including interview recordings and transcripts, life history charts, church literature, recordings and transcripts of church services (including testimonies, songs, sermons, prayers, liturgy, discussions), observational notes of church meetings and other events, notes of informal conversations and everyday life, photographs, schoolbooks, statistical and historical information from church records, newspaper articles, notes of

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, my relationship with the local GILLBT team continued on an informal level, as they helped me to find accommodation and acted as my first source of information on the village and its churches. Despite the fact that after the initial few weeks my contact with them was mainly social, even towards the end of my fieldwork I was aware that many people still thought I was working with them on translating the Bible into Ahanta. This association, though false (and I corrected it wherever possible), probably did no harm to my own image within the community, especially among Ahanta-speakers and church-goers.

television and radio programmes and my own reflective journal. The range of different kinds of data permitted triangulation between them (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 231), helping to identify the scope of different themes and issues and to avoid ending up with purely anecdotal data. I worked with four main research assistants: one acted as my language teacher during the first half of the fieldwork; one helped me gather contextual information on the case study location and translated recordings of church services for me; the other two arranged and interpreted interviews.

### **Profiling and contextualisation**

On a practical level the fieldwork was split into two halves, divided by a ten-week return trip to the UK between December 2005 and February 2006. I used the months leading up to December to establish the context of the more detailed data collection carried out during the second half of the fieldwork, building a profile of the community in general and the church landscape in particular. This was done mainly through interviews and my own observations. Further information on the community was gathered through a local research assistant familiar with the village. An overview of the churches in Ndwumizili was constructed through attendance at Sunday services, introducing myself to the congregations, and semi-structured interviews with each of the church leaders.

### ***Preliminary church leader interviews***

I piloted the church leader interview in July with the pastor of the Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC), who also happened to be my landlady and therefore easy to re-interview if necessary. The rest of the interviews took place between September and November, following a short trip back to the UK in August.

There were two main aims of the church leader interviews and participatory observation of services. Firstly, to introduce myself to the church leaders, to explain what I was doing in the village and to ask for their collaboration, suggestions and feedback. Secondly, to build up a picture of the church landscape in the village, to enable me both to select churches for more detailed research and to set that research in context. I wanted to contextualise the research on three levels: socially, mapping

out the church population of Ndwumizili; historically, charting the development of Christianity and different churches; and institutionally, mapping the different churches in terms of their structure and type. Questions therefore related to the structure of the church on local, national and international levels; size and composition of the congregation; national and local history of the church; order of service for Sunday meetings; activities, meetings and groups within the church; role of the church leader; and perceived challenges for the church. These interviews were conducted in English, recorded digitally and then transcribed on word-processing software, which enabled me to pick out issues for clarification or follow-up, either with the pastors themselves, a research assistant or other appropriate members of the community.

I thus emerged at the end of the first half of fieldwork with an overview of the context in which I was working and a picture of the Christian landscape in Ndwumizili. I then had to establish some parameters for my in-depth research.

### **Church selection**

Out of the eleven churches in Ndwumizili I decided to focus on two, the Assemblies of God Church (AG) and the MDCC. The aim of this study is not to make generalisations, across either places or denominations. However, it is hoped that it will provide some insight into the wider religious movements and environment in Ghana, and the processes through which this is worked out in everyday life. Studying both commonalities and peculiarities, this study is therefore valuable both intrinsically and instrumentally (Stake 2003; Ragin 1987). Although this is not strictly a comparative study, looking at more than one church provides a sense of variation and context. Any more than two would make it difficult to achieve depth in the research: even the decision to study two obviously halved the amount of time I could spend at each.

These two churches represent two different categories found in the village (and in Ghana): the AG church is Pentecostal, originating from an American mission which began work in Ghana in 1931, whereas the MDCC is a Ghanaian indigenous church which started as a breakaway group from the Methodists in 1919. The pastors of both



the MDCC and the AG are residents of Ndwumizili, easily accessible and willing to provide assistance with my research.

I therefore had two churches on which to centre my research, but although these defined the focus they did not define the limits of my study. Churches do not exist in a vacuum: they are in some way products of the community in which they exist and therefore cannot be studied out of context. There is a dynamic relationship between the church and the community: church members are also community members and community members do not remain untouched by the presence of churches. Lives are not entirely constructed within churches, and congregations are fluid and transient, people constantly moving in and out of and between them.

## **Participant observation**

The foundation of my fieldwork was the observation of life, whether important occasions or everyday happenings. This is discussed in more detail below; here I give an overview of the different types of observation I undertook.

### ***Church attendance***

Attendance at church services was, of course, important. As described above, on settling in Ndwumizili I attended services of each of the churches in the village, visiting most churches more than once. During the second part of my fieldwork I narrowed down my focus to the AG and MDCC. I planned to attend them alternately for three consecutive weeks each, although in practice this was not always possible due to interruptions by church events and my own schedule (for instance, illness and travel). This was further complicated from June 2006, when the MDCC pastor was promoted to the position of District Pastor, therefore transferring to head the church at a nearby town (although for the time being remaining resident in Ndwumizili). The pastor of neighbouring Eleni was assigned the task of overseeing the Ndwumizili branch in addition to his own; consequently joint services were held from then onwards, alternately at Eleni and Ndwumizili.

Church services are held in the Fante language. Sometimes interpretation support was available during the service (at the AG church the pastor's wife would interpret

the sermon and Sunday school for me), but frequently this was not possible (in the MDCC there was nobody sufficiently fluent in English). I therefore also (with permission) made recordings of the services and then transcribed the oral translations of these made by a research assistant, which left me free to make visual observations during the service. Due to the impracticalities of translating and managing huge amounts of recorded data (a typical church service lasts about three hours), I took notes of evening prayer meetings, Bible studies and services in other churches instead of recording them. Altogether I made audio recordings of 21 church meetings over a period of six months, between March and August 2006.

Within Sunday services many different activities take place, including praying, singing, dancing, preaching, testimonies, offerings and administrative notices. The AG also holds an adult Sunday School (Bible class) prior to the main service. Transcriptions of church services therefore contained several different types of data: song lyrics, prayers, prepared sermons, unprepared exhortations, testimonies, discussions, liturgy, announcements, and these were combined with observational notes describing, for instance, use of space, activities, emotion and dress. Since several elements of services (in particular music and dancing, testimonies and Sunday school) consist of discussions or contributions by members of the congregation, and all elements involve the congregation in some role (such as a listening audience) analysis of services not only gave me a picture of the teachings and practices of the church as an institution, but also insight into how members relate to these teachings and practices.

### ***Attendance at church festivals and conventions***

In addition to regular services, I also attended meetings at other branches and special occasions within both churches, including Thanksgiving (fundraising) services, inauguration services, the Easter convention and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the AG, and the annual residential Peace Festival of the MDCC. These events were usually joint services with other branches, which helped to set the Ndwumizili congregations in context in terms of their respective broader churches.

### ***Non-church events and everyday life***

Participating in church events formed only part of the observation element of the fieldwork. As pointed out above, churches do not exist in a vacuum, and understanding how they relate to the society of which they are products is integral to my research. It was therefore helpful to attend and enquire about occasions external to the church, such as funerals and baby-naming ceremonies. Some of these events I attended as a stranger (funeral celebrations often take place on the street, open for anyone to join); in others I played a more personal role, for example as an ‘aunt’ at a baby ‘outdooring’ ceremony.

However, the most enlightening insights into local culture and society came from the continuous observation of everyday life: conversations about mundane, apparently unimportant topics and more probing questions about interesting issues; observation of dress, of what people do throughout the day and who does it, how they address each other, when they laugh, when they cry and when they don’t react at all, what they spend money on and what they don’t, how they relate to strangers, friends and family. However irrational and arbitrary they might seem, people generally do things for a reason. Behaviour, actions and reactions are all indicative of deeper principles and logics (see Olivier de Sardan 1999) by which the individual manages immediate situations. One of my richest sources of data, then, is the journal in which I noted down all these things.

Burgess (1984) identifies three types of fieldnotes. ‘Substantive’ notes “consist of a continuous record of the situations, events and conversations in which the researcher participates” (p.167); ‘methodological’ notes consist of “personal reflections on [the researcher’s] activities in the field ... problems, impressions, feelings and hunches as well as ... processes and procedures” (p.172); finally, ‘analytic’ notes consist of “preliminary analyses”, indicating emerging themes and ways of developing concepts (p.174). My journal included each of these kinds of notes: for instance, ‘substantive’ jottings of shop names, extracts of conversations and descriptions of scenes; ‘analytic’ reflections on concepts and issues and categorisation of themes; and ‘methodological’ thoughts on the progress of the study. Regarding the latter, I used my journal to engage reflexively with my research, noting down my own feelings, reactions, and attitudes, the sense of my role in the community, how I was influencing the research and how the research was influencing me. As Hammersley

and Atkinson assert, the construction of such notes forces the researcher “to question *what* one knows, *how* such knowledge has been acquired, the *degree of certainty* of such knowledge, and what further lines of inquiry are implied” (1995: 192). They point out that such a record maintained throughout the fieldwork can prove invaluable in retracing the development of the study. Inclusion of the researcher’s personal feelings and involvement is important because it helps to reveal how the research has been constructed in terms of social relationships and perspectives on data: “what is noteworthy, what is regarded as strange and problematic, and what appears to be mundane and obvious” (p.192). Janesick emphasises the journal as a major data-source, pointing out that “[b]ecause the researcher is the research instrument, keeping a journal is a check and balance in the entire course of a qualitative research project”, and seeing it as a “tangible way to evaluate our experience, improve and clarify one’s thinking ... a way to clarify, reinterpret, and define much of our work” (1999: 521).

## **Interviews**

### ***Life history interviews***

In talking to members of the two congregations, my aim was to get an idea of people’s sense of belonging to their church. More specifically, I was interested in five areas: a) movement between churches; b) reasons for attending or stopping church; c) likes and dislikes about church; d) advantages and disadvantages of going to church; e) activities, roles and responsibilities within church. I conducted interviews using a simple adapted life history approach. Most lasted between 15 and 45 minutes and produced an outline of the subject’s history, plotted along a timeline representing their life and focusing particularly on their church life.

### ***Non-church member interviews***

To set the information elicited from these interviews in context, I used the same technique to interview a small number of people from outside the AG and MDCC, either members of or associated with other churches.<sup>8</sup> I used semi-structured interviews to elicit contextual information from elderly people of the community,

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<sup>8</sup> I intended to talk to people with no church association as well, but none appeared to exist.

particularly about changes within the village. All of these interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed electronically, but there were many other informal interviews that I did not record, especially with my key informants, the pastors of the two churches, whom I often pestered with questions.

### ***Sampling and interview practicalities***

A number of practical issues affected the interview process. Ndwumizili is not monolingual: the local language is Ahanta, but the dominant language along much of the coast of Ghana is Fante and there are numerous non-Ahanta speakers in Ndwumizili.<sup>9</sup> A large part of its population, especially women, do not speak much English, and I therefore made an effort to learn to communicate in Ahanta. This language has only very recently been written down and so has few printed documents and no teaching materials for non-Ahanta speakers. I therefore had to piece together the tones (Ahanta is a tonal language), grammar and syntax myself. I designed my own training, working daily with a language assistant and practising what I learned in conversations with others. To speak to non-English speakers in depth I worked with two main interpreters, a female student who is an AG member and a male student who was brought up in the MDCC. Having research assistants who already knew the people we were interviewing helped a great deal not only in creating a more relaxed atmosphere, but also in arranging meetings and searching for people at their houses. Before interviewing other people I conducted interviews with the interpreters themselves and we discussed the questions and techniques, which not only gave me additional data but also helped to refine the method and provide the interpreters with a close understanding of its objectives and execution.

Secondly, availability. Arranging appointments in advance was usually impractical (it was very unlikely that the meeting would actually occur), so it was often necessary to search for people at their houses. My first interpreter was extremely helpful in this respect, being familiar not only with the location of the homes of church members, but also with daily life and routines in the village.

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<sup>9</sup> In Ndwumizili and other towns Ahanta children are often spoken to by their parents in Fante, which is also used in the first years of school; consequently people of Ahanta ethnicity do not necessarily speak Ahanta.

Thirdly, not everybody wanted to take part in my research. This was not always evident, since to deny somebody a request outright is not considered polite. People rather conveyed their disinclination through repeated deferments, excuses and failure to turn up to arranged interviews. On the other hand, several people were very willing to take part but simply led busy lives, sometimes missing five or six appointments before an interview finally took place.

These difficulties, along with issues relating to people's responses within the context of a formal interview (discussed later in the chapter), meant that I used this method to complement the observational techniques described above rather than relying on interview data to constitute the bulk of my research. Working within these restrictions I tried to get a representative cross-section of the congregations, in terms of gender, age, income and regularity of attendance. Details of interviews are given below<sup>10</sup>:

**Table 3.1: AG and MDCC member life history interviews**

		Actual adult members	Typical adult attendance	Interviewed
MDCC	Male	10	2 - 3	4
	Female	45	30 - 40	9
AG	Male	12	3 - 8	4
	Female	30	12 - 15	12
Total		97		29

<sup>10</sup> There is some ambiguity in these statistics, since being a member of a church does not necessarily mean actually attending services, and different people may attend on different days. Moreover, several people have attended numerous churches in the past (which may include both AG and MDCC) but currently do not attend any regularly. These statistics are therefore based on people's self-identification with church denominations. See Chapter 4 for details of churches in Ndumizili.

**Table 3.2: Interviews with non-AG and non-MDCC members**

	Interviewed
Church leaders (including MDCC and AG)	11*
Members of other churches	5**
Both MDCC and AG (past membership)	1
Older people	4
Total	20

\* Deeper Life, Church of Pentecost, Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist, MDCC, AG, Christ Apostolic, Christ Bethel, Roman Catholic, Action, Church of the Twelve Apostles

\*\* Deeper Life, Church of Pentecost, Methodist, International Central Gospel Church and Zion International

The figures in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 refer to the number of people interviewed; however, many of these were returned to more than once for further discussion, which usually took a less formal, more conversational form.

### **Group discussions**

Apart from informal conversations within groups of people, I experimented with conducting more formal group discussions within AG services. However, I quickly realised that this was not a method that would work easily. This was partly due to the language barrier, prohibiting natural responsiveness. Time was also an issue, as the inclusion of a slot for my questions meant that the pastor had to reorganise the service and cut back on other elements such as singing and preaching, which not only inconvenienced the church, but also altered the very thing I was studying. Far better was to draw on data from discussions already integrated into the meetings in the form of the ‘Sunday school’, which always preceded the main service. Although I could not choose the topic or direct the discussion, this provided more insight into what was important to church members. These discussions were also not subject to the inhibitions and politeness that the church members showed in answering my questions (see below for more on the significance of my identity in my research), and often became quite heated.

### **Sources of background data**

I drew on many additional sources of data. The church regional offices and headquarters provided me with background information on the respective churches,

including statistics on growth rates. Literature published by the churches (histories, teaching material, apologetics, magazines etc.) revealed valuable information on history, doctrine and practices. Local church records provided financial and membership details. As well as information from the churches, newspapers, radio and television programmes proved a rich source of data on current debates, opinions and happenings. Publications such as school textbooks gave illuminating insights into societal values and traditions.

### ***Ethical considerations***

Throughout this research I have endeavoured to ensure that my attitude towards and relationships with the people involved in the study have been characterised by respect. This entailed putting into place measures to avoid any possibility or sense of deception of respondents, and to ensure that the stories and information with which they entrusted me were not used in ways which would disadvantage them. To this end, all names of respondents as well as the names of places which would identify the location of the research have been changed. It has not been possible to conceal the denominational identity of the churches, as their history and structure is intrinsic to the study; however, as multiple branches of these churches exist in the Western Region of Ghana this does not reveal the identity of either the village or of individuals. Recognisable photographs of people personally implicated in the research have been withheld.

As mentioned above, recordings of interviews and church services were made with permission, and the former were listened to only by me. The latter were translated by a research assistant. At all times and as far as possible I endeavoured to explain to respondents the purpose and nature of my work in order to obtain their informed consent. This, however, this was not always straightforward. In the following section I discuss the complexity of ethical issues in the context of relationships in the field.



## ***Participant observation and relationships***

*If you want to dance, you change your way of walking.* (Akan proverb, Appiah *et al.* 2007: 225)

In all qualitative studies it is essential to consider the nature of relations within the field—specifically the relationship between the researcher and the research subjects—and the extent to which they influence the research. Participant observation by definition requires reflection on the role of the fieldworker in terms of its two elements, participation and observation. The classic typology of potential roles for a fieldworker involved in this kind of research ranges from ‘complete participant’, through ‘participant as observer’ and ‘observer as participant’ to ‘complete observer’ (Gold 1958, 1969). Gans (1968) uses the terminology of ‘total participant’, ‘researcher-participant’ and ‘total researcher’, while Adler and Adler place the emphasis on membership: ‘peripheral-member’, ‘active-member’ and ‘complete-member’ researchers (Adler & Adler 1987, 1994). Whichever typology is employed, the main questions under consideration are the extent to which the fieldworker participates in the activities of the group s/he is studying, and the extent to which members of that group are aware that they are being studied. Here I want to focus on the first of these questions. However, instead of asking which role it is appropriate for a researcher to adopt, I highlight the ambiguity, multiplicity and fluidity of these positions and address the question of how the role of the fieldworker and the relationship between her and her research subjects is constructed by both parties (fieldworker and research subjects). Using extracts from my field notes I look firstly at the active construction of my position by the people around me, and secondly at my own part in determining my role, before discussing the aspects of identity which inform these social constructions in terms of social difference.

### **Fieldwork on ‘their’ terms**

Working with people, particularly in a foreign environment, means foregoing a certain amount of independence. I was continually dependent on others for my basic living, my understanding of life and the practical carrying out of my research. Sometimes this felt restrictive and frequently frustrating, but as well as being unavoidable it also often helped to form and maintain relationships, which facilitated

my research. My role as participant observer was thus partly determined by the part played by the people I was studying in involving me in their activities and positioning me within their world. Members of both churches took an active role in including me and determining my participation in the church context in a way that did not depend on me. As I considered my role in their lives, they were also concerned with their participation in my life, whether as hosts, as ‘brothers and sisters in Christ’, as church leaders or as potential beneficiaries of my relative wealth. In this sense, a further category should perhaps be added to the typologies mentioned above: the ‘observed participant’.

Particularly at the beginning of the fieldwork, as the outsider with limited local and cultural knowledge I was very much in the hands of the church members during meetings, dependent on them for my understanding of what was happening around me. In that sense the balance of power therefore came down heavily on their side, both as hosts and as gatekeepers of knowledge. I had no choice but to be dependent on them. And indeed members of the churches were not passive in their reception of me; even before I requested language help the pastor of the AG attempted to interpret for me, and in subsequent services directed his wife to take on this role, sometimes prompted by other members of the congregation. In smaller evening Bible study or prayer meetings when she was not present he would often interpret for himself, speaking first in Fante and then in English, not because I asked him to, but because of his desire to include me.

Working in the context of a foreign language both hampered and facilitated my research. I decided to learn Ahanta instead of Fante partly because it was the Ahanta Bible Translation team that introduced me to the village, partly because I had been informed that Ahanta was the language used in churches,<sup>11</sup> but mostly because, knowing from previous experience the importance that people attribute to their own language, I wanted to learn my research subjects’ mother tongue rather than their second language. It paid off to a certain extent. It certainly distinguished me from other white people, and I found that people appreciated the effort I made, mouths often dropping open in amazement and delight when I so much as said good morning in Ahanta. Learning the language gave people a reason to want to talk to me, if only

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<sup>11</sup> It turned out that Ahanta is spoken in churches in more remote, monolingual villages, but Fante is used in this village.

to test me and correct my mistakes. For in-depth conversations I often needed an interpreter, but the relationship itself was initiated in Ahanta—in their language, not mine, space where they felt more comfortable than I did.

The language barrier prevented me from participating in normal conversation and from easily following church proceedings, distancing me from church members and reinforcing my status as an outsider. On the other hand, it raised my awareness of language issues within the church: for example, in the AG one man, from the north of Ghana, found it difficult to follow Fante and preferred to use English, and even my interpreter, from the east of the country, was lost on the rare occasions when the pastor spoke in Ahanta. Language was more of a barrier in the MDCC, where very few of the members spoke English and I had no interpretation assistance. In this situation I was positioned much more as an observer than as a participant.

However, a lack of verbal understanding places greater emphasis on the other senses. Understanding does not come purely through language, and much of the time the sense of the events around me was encapsulated in practice.

19/03/06

*I noticed again how much ritual there is in a service in this church [MDCC]. Everyone knows exactly what to say and when, when to sit and stand, when to place your hand on your heart, wave it in the air, clap in a certain rhythm, bow down, shout amen. Like a choreographed musical—everyone in perfect time. At the same time the service—especially the sermon—was continually interrupted by apparently random outbursts of song from certain members of the congregation, particularly the women sitting at the front of the room, which everyone would join in with. Perhaps these interruptions are more like punctuation, not so spontaneous but also choreographed.*

It was only by repeated observation of the same events and requests for explanations from church members and leaders that I began to identify and understand patterns in what I saw, and was able to join in myself. On one level this knowledge-through-practice enabled me to reposition myself and participate to a greater extent than knowledge-through-language might have done. Similarly, participating in activities with AG church members gave me an embodied understanding of their actions that deepened as time went by.

16/08/06

*Now when I'm taking part in simultaneous group prayers [each person praying individually and aloud but on the same theme and at the same time] in church I can feel myself adopting the forceful Pentecostal style, lots of emphasis, some repetition. I don't concentrate on the words so much ... don't think a lot about what I'm saying.*

Again, it was repeated participation in church meetings that helped me begin to understand the intensity of this style of prayer, where the action of calling out to God and the emotion expressed in this action is accorded greater importance than the precise words used.

I soon realised that the extent of my participation in the churches would not be purely on my own terms. During the meetings I was continually encouraged to join in. During AG discussions I was routinely asked to contribute. At other points of the service I would sometimes be encouraged to dance with the women, or asked to read a Bible passage or pray over the offering or at the close of the meeting. This active inclusion extended further than the inside of the church building: I was also expected to join the congregation in local activities, for instance visiting a bereaved family and evangelising in the community, and invited to attend regional events such as the Easter convention in a nearby town and the church's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in the city.

The MDCC members were not so active in including me in their activities, although they never excluded me. Within church meetings, though, I was not entirely free to decide my level of participation, for instance being urged to join in with the dancing. During the last service I attended I made a donation towards the church building:

15/10/06

*Having made a short speech in Ahanta thanking them for their help and hospitality during my stay, I handed over the money and sat down again. But on the pastor's direction one of the women put a chair in the centre of the room and they asked me to sit there. The elders and choristers gathered around me and started praying for me. When they had finished I got up to resume my usual seat, but the pastor, after some discussion with other members of the church, came over to me and explained that they wanted me to sing to the*

*church [as people often do when they make a special offering]. So I closed my eyes, told myself it would be much easier to comply than to refuse, and sang. Again I tried to sit down, and again the pastor came up to me. “Sister Akua<sup>12</sup>, they say you should dance. You have to lead them.”*

On other occasions I was asked to take a less central role in church rituals. Below I describe part of the presentation of a baby of a woman I was close to, in which I was directed to participate:

02/08/06

*When it came to the baby presentation, two chairs were placed in the middle of the room, facing the table. Emma sat in one with the baby, and Kwame’s junior brother sat in the other, stepping in for the baby’s father. Each of the women sitting at the front (to my left) and the men were given a palm frond and danced in a circle around the chairs—myself included. When I hesitated to join them the elder took my arm: “Come, come.”*

Sometimes my inclusion in the meetings served to heighten the sense of difference between myself and members of the congregation. This was especially clear in my assigned and non-negotiable position within the room at every meeting, next to the pastor at the front of the church, facing the congregation.

Another time I was assigned a role in the offering:

27/06/06

*The offerings went on and on. [...] Four people gave ₵20,000, nobody gave ₵10,000, four gave ₵5,000, about 10 gave ₵2,000 and lots came up to give ₵1,000.<sup>13</sup> The people who gave ₵20,000 and ₵5,000, after being prayed for, were sent to shake my hand.*

Within the AG church the pastor in particular considered me, to a certain extent, as a new member of his church, to whom he had obligations and responsibilities. He sometimes included me in his rounds of visiting church members at their homes, and made repeated attempts to reassure me and encourage me in what he (and the rest of the village) appeared to consider my biggest problem, my lack of a husband.

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<sup>12</sup> My Ghanaian name, meaning that I was born on a Wednesday.

<sup>13</sup> ₵1 at the time equalled approximately 17,000 cedis.

However, I was never seen as a full member of either church, due to a number of reasons. Firstly, I was known to be a member of an Anglican church in the UK (when, at the end of my fieldwork, I donated some plastic chairs to the AG to show my gratitude for their help, in his acceptance speech the pastor commented “and she is not even an Assemblies of God member, she is an Anglican”). Secondly, I did not attend every meeting and the congregations were aware that this was because I was also visiting other churches. This knowledge in itself did not appear to be an issue because—and thirdly—my purpose as a researcher was made clear from the beginning, so I was not expected to be fully committed to either church.

In non-church contexts too my role was not entirely on my own terms. At a traditional baby-naming ceremony for another woman within my household, I was expected to participate as one of her sisters:

21/08/06

*Saturday was the outdooring for Beth's baby, Kweku. [...] On one side of the terrace sat the women—Abena, Ama (who held the baby), Beth, myself, Emma and a few more; on the opposite side sat Jason, his stand-in 'father' and a couple of his friends.*

At other times my role was constructed in ways other than which I would have desired, for example constantly being seen as a source of money. Occasionally when somebody would come to the house to request financial help and I was not in, my landlady would make the decision for me, giving money on my behalf for me to reimburse her later. On the other hand, I was sometimes also uncomfortable with the extent to which others in the household insisted on serving me, for instance taking dishes from me as I washed them. These two examples taken together echo of patron-client relations, but it is important to note that they did not involve the same people. When I asked one of the teenagers why he refused to let me perform menial tasks he replied “You are white, I am black”, and when I queried whether this was a valid reason he qualified it with “You are a stranger”.

Research subjects could also influence my role as participant-observer by choosing the degree to which they would participate in my research. Some would repeatedly ask to be interviewed, others refused when I asked them.

18/07/06

*Earlier I approached some of the women in the house to ask them what makes people 'good' and 'bad' in Ghanaian society. They fell silent and didn't say anything. Nothing at all. They said some things to each other in Fante, but nothing to me. Emma muttered something about it being Ghana so not about her [she is from a different West African country] and went downstairs, Adjoa said she didn't understand, then after a while said something about "rasta boys", but when I asked for more she said "some are good, some are bad" and wouldn't elaborate. Beth wouldn't even look at me. [...] It's like they just go wooden whenever I ask anything—close up completely. And these are the people I know best, see every day, give most to.*

People have different reasons for not wanting to participate in research. In this case it appeared to be a reluctance to state opinions 'on the record' and in the hearing of others: in this society there is a constant undercurrent of distrust and fear of gossip and 'enemies'. A reason given for refusing an interview by a woman at another time was that she felt she would not understand and would not know what to say. Another rationale for non-participation that I picked up was an unwillingness to reveal or discuss aspects of one's life which could be seen as shameful. This often included participation in any religious activity deemed 'unchristian' by the churches, such as the consultation of juju practitioners or 'fetish priests'. Whatever the reason, by refusing to accept my terms of our relationship people forced me to reassess both the relationship and my methods of gathering data, for instance using informal conversation at times when we were alone rather than structured questions in the hearing of others, sometimes focussing on opinions and third-party rather than personal stories, and taking extra care not to appear judgmental on moral or religious issues.

The fieldworker's role as a participant-observer is therefore determined largely by the people she is researching. Sometimes they insist on a greater level of participation and identification than one might desire; sometimes they choose to highlight the differences between themselves and the researcher and in so doing again enforce a role other than that which she may have preferred. They can also reject the terms of the relationship offered by the fieldworker by refusing to participate in her research in the way she desires. The research subjects position the researcher according to their understanding of how a stranger, a member of a different church, a researcher, a sister, a European, a person with wealth and

education should be treated. This is informed and shaped by the social structures in which they live, thus the fieldworker is not restricted simply by the actions and decisions of individuals, but by overarching structures within which she also must operate to negotiate her position (see Irwin 2006 for further discussion of the importance of recognising social structures in the practice of research).

### **Fieldwork on my terms**

The second significant factor determining my role as a participant observer was my own conscious decisions regarding the extent to which I wanted to participate. I was continually forced to make decisions about my actions within meetings. The clearest example of this—and one that constantly reoccurred—concerned church offerings. The question of how much to give was made more complex by multiple offerings of different types; the public nature of some of them, whereby it was impossible to keep secret the amount given; and my relative wealth in comparison with other members of the congregation. I was also aware of how my motivations for giving might differ from those of people around me, and how my own moral values (for example, anonymity in giving, or the extent to which poor people should be required to give money) influenced my view of the offerings. The consequences of participation or non-participation in this area were therefore multiple and my decisions were formed in the tension between several considerations, related to moral values (*I don't want to reinforce practices I don't agree with*); personal, social and research needs (*I don't want to accentuate differences between myself and them; I don't want to offend them; I want them to think well of me*); research ethics (*I don't want to influence or change my research subject*); altruism (*I want to help them*); personal religious values (*I want to give to God*). Each time I took part or declined to take part in an offering my action had consequences in all of these areas, whether or not I considered each one at the time.

Particularly within the MDCC, I was forced to consider how far I wanted to participate in activities that did not entirely concur with my own religious values.

24/08/06

*I'm not comfortable with many of the MDCC rituals and doctrines—calling angels, multiple offerings, communal bathing with prayed-over water, candles, incense, oil. Polygamy, animal*



*sacrifice [...]. On the one hand I don't want to judge it—it's not my role and I don't have the right to say whether what people here are doing is right or wrong. On the other hand, it's so far removed from what I've been taught and brought up with that I can't just accept it and take part in it. [...] I can see that this might suit particular people here, fit in with Ghanaian culture, but I'm not those people, I'm not Ghanaian. So how far do I 'participate' in my observation? Where's the line between trying to understand and compromising my own values?*

At an MDCC festival I passed a stall selling the copper crosses and rings worn by MDCC members, and the pastor I was with asked if I wanted to buy some. I said I would like to as a souvenir, but wasn't sure if it would be correct behaviour since I was not a member. She responded that it was fine, and then encouraged me to wear them, also telling others that I had bought the items. Now I had a dilemma. The people I was with were obviously very pleased that I had bought the jewellery, and didn't understand why I should buy it if I didn't intend to wear it. The items were a sign of identification with the church. To refuse to wear them would have been to refuse to be associated with the MDCC and thus may have caused offence, whereas to put them on may have given a false impression of my relationship with the church, both to its members and to non-members who are not necessarily sympathetic to the MDCC, as well as associating myself with activities and doctrines I did not necessarily agree with.<sup>14</sup> I had a similar experience with the T-shirt and cap I was expected to wear to participate in the AG 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, although these were only expected to be worn at this one-off occasion.

Decisions I made regarding how I represented myself to others often, therefore, had ethical implications. Firstly, there was an issue of transparency and sincerity. There is a difference between attempting to understand a group of people and actually becoming one of them, but although the researcher may know where she stands on this issue (and this is not necessarily the case), it may not be obvious—or may appear differently—to members of the group. Although I tried hard to be transparent in my work, obtaining informed consent from my participants, this was not always possible in situations such as the one described above where, other than the members of the Ndwumizili branch, the thousand or so people at the MDCC festival had no idea of

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<sup>14</sup> I later discovered that these items, although engraved with the initials of the church, are not worn exclusively by church members. Non-members, even members of other churches, sometimes wear them, or more often put them on their children, considering them to provide spiritual protection.

what I was doing and were delighted to see a European apparently joining their church.

The other side of the issue of being transparent and honest with others is being honest with oneself. I was not at ease wearing the Musama cross and ring partly because I felt uncomfortable wearing symbols of something I did not necessarily believe in or agree with—both because of the message about myself I was aware I was sending to other people and because of my own conscience. I found it easier to wear the AG T-shirt because the doctrines of this church are closer to my own. The question here is to what extent we should compromise our own principles in order better to understand others. How far should researchers participate in activities they don't agree with? Angrosino and Mays de Pérez discuss issues of deception and the pressure (and guilt) often felt by female researchers “to conform to the gender behavior norms of the cultures they study, even if those norms are not the ones they would freely choose for themselves”, contrasted against possible negative consequences of “defy[ing] the norms of the community being studied” (2003: 127). Coming from an Anglican background in Britain, certain of the practices in the churches I was studying, such as those of the MDCC or the fundraising techniques mentioned above, I could not reconcile with my own beliefs and moral values. I was therefore faced with the dilemma of either not participating and thus distancing and perhaps sending a negative message to the church members, or taking part and thus condoning and actively involving myself in things I did not agree with. Contrary to Wacquant's “call to moral and sensual immersion in the field” (Wacquant 2004 in Irwin 2006: 157), I usually chose the former course and remained a non-participant observer in such situations.

However, there are several areas in which changing my behaviour in order to participate did not cause me any moral dilemmas. For example, I conformed to expectations in clothing at church, having Ghanaian-style outfits made up and wearing a headscarf at the MDCC festival. Outside church too, I endeavoured to make my behaviour conform to standards of the churches concerned, for instance wearing appropriate clothing and abstaining from alcohol. This was important not only in order for the churches to trust me and take me seriously, but also as courtesy and respect for the community in which I was living.

As time went by and I gained more knowledge of the cultural context, I was able to understand better the way in which different facets of identity (such as race, age and wealth) were constructed in that society. I could therefore not only start to understand the way in which other people constructed my position, but I could actively engage with this to influence my role as participant/observer. For example, in the way I related to one older woman:

21/09/05

*She's so domineering—sometimes I find it hard to cope with. [...] I'm not sure how much I should treat her with respect and act submissive and how much I should resist.*

Or, in another context, decisions I made about which clothes to wear, which food to eat and how to eat it:

04/03/06

*[At a funeral, the man I am talking to] repeats several times that I'm one of the family ("we're both wearing black"—that was important). [...] He laughs and tells someone that I am Ghanaian. [...] The host comes back and asks what I would like to eat—rice or fufu. I say rice and he goes away, only to return a few minutes later saying there is no rice, only fufu—is that ok? I say yes of course, and they joke about whether or not I will use a knife and fork to eat it—which I don't.*

Throughout my fieldwork I made a deliberate attempt to reduce the distance between myself and the people I was studying by following their lead in terms of dress and by learning to eat in the local manner.

The particular aspect of my identity that I emphasised at any one time made a great difference to the type of data I obtained, as is clear from the example discussed above of women refusing to answer my questions, compared with a second situation involving one of the same women where I took a different approach to gathering data:

28/07/06

*I sat in the courtyard and chatted to Emma, who's smoking some fish down there. She's very willing to talk when it's not formal—*

*and perhaps when others are not around. She made some interesting comments [...]*

In the second situation I remained within the role of ‘sister’ (see below), whereas in the first I stepped out of that role. In the context of these relationships, if I presented myself as a researcher I would get little response, beyond an awkward silence, a refusal to meet my eyes and a change of subject. If, however, I downplayed that aspect of my identity and, in this case, emphasised my similarity with Emma in age, gender and non-Ghanaian status, in the context of a general conversation I could ask anything and receive friendly, natural responses and often more information than I had requested. As Mama asserts in her study of subjectivity in the context of black women in Britain, “[i]ndividuals have many discourses and discursive positions available to them, and the positions they take up are momentary, changing with the different social contexts and relations they find themselves in” (1995: 99). As most people do consciously or unconsciously in everyday life, I stressed different facets of my identity in different contexts, for example, my religious orientation at church and with pastors, and my professional status when visiting offices. With older women I would follow the cultural conventions of respect in order to present myself in a good light; with younger men I might highlight my superiority in age so as to gain respect from them. If I wanted particular or more detailed information I would sometimes deliberately emphasise my outsider status as a European, so as to appear ignorant and wanting to learn rather than inquisitive and demanding.

The relationship between researcher and research subjects is therefore mutually constructed and negotiated, informed by the socio-cultural background of each. Insofar as she has the freedom to do so, the fieldworker continually makes decisions regarding her level of participation. These decisions may have several different bases (moral, religious and professional values; personal, social and research needs) which will not necessarily concur with the worldview of her research subjects. However, especially as she becomes better acquainted with the context of her study, she has the potential to vary the extent of her participation and manipulate relationships in order to achieve her own aims.

## Social difference

In the context of discussions about ‘Self’ and ‘Other’, Michelle Fine talks about “working the hyphen” (‘Self-Other’), recognising that these are not two distinct categories:

By *working the hyphen* I mean to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations. (Fine 1994: 72)

During my fieldwork I simultaneously played various roles in my relationships with the people around me, and these roles developed and changed over time. For instance, to my landlady, who was also the pastor of one of the churches I was studying, I was both tenant and church attendee. As a younger woman living in her house I was also considered her daughter (acquaintances would ask after my “mother”); I was a sister to the other women in the household and an aunt to their children. To some of my research assistants I was an employer and a friend; to one I was a granddaughter. To almost everybody I was an actual or potential source of financial support. And I was also, of course, a researcher.

These roles involve different rights, duties and responsibilities, specific to the local culture. However, identities are constructed through perceptions of difference (Hall & du Gay 1996; Hunt 2002), and roles are negotiated in every relationship (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez 2003: 124-6). As an *oburoni* (white person) I was always different and therefore constructed my own unique position in relationship with the people around me, continually adapted and renegotiated in each situation and in relation to each person I came into contact with. As Haraway puts it, my identity was “a kind of disassembled and reassembled unity” (cited in Grossberg 1996: 91). My relationship with my ‘mother’ was different from that which she had with her other ‘daughters’ in the household (also not daughters by birth, but within the same family): the power dynamic flowed in two directions, based mainly on her seniority in age and my white skin and greater wealth. For example, she would expect me to address her with respect and to obey her when she told me to do something, but she would not expect me to serve her as did the other women. Sometimes, too, she would request financial help from me, whereas my ‘sisters’ were mostly supported by her. So our relationship was mutually constructed, through the

way she positioned me in her world and viewed her own rights and responsibilities regarding me, and the way I positioned her within my world.

My position at any given moment was determined by the complex interplay of different axes of social difference, such as race, gender, marital status, education, age, wealth and religious orientation, and continually renegotiated by myself and others in different contexts. This inevitably affected the data I was exposed to as well as how I interpreted them: as Angrosino & Mays de Pérez point out, “different ethnographers—equally well trained and well versed in theory and method but of different gender, race, or age—might well stimulate a very different set of interactions” (2003: 133).

Throughout my fieldwork I was seen as an outsider and I saw as an outsider. This, of course, had both advantages and disadvantages. As an outsider with no pre-established relationship people had no reason to trust me, a stranger coming to inquire into their affairs and then leaving again. Yet sometimes it is easier to talk openly to someone you are not close to—and who is not close to your friends and family—than to someone who is. Furthermore, an outsider coming into the community has no established ties or loyalties. Until, of course, she starts talking to people, forming relationships with people and making associations for herself.

As an outsider I faced the danger of “failing to understand the perspective of participants” (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 110). I would never be ‘one of them’; it is never possible fully to see through someone else’s eyes. I did not have the basic background knowledge and understanding that comes from being brought up in the society and which is usually taken for granted. But not taking things for granted is the essential advantage of the outsider: everything is questioned, everything analysed from a perspective difficult for an insider to attain. Hammersley and Atkinson state:

“From the perspective of the ‘marginal’ reflexive ethnographer, there can ... be no question of total commitment, ‘surrender’, or ‘becoming’. There must always remain some part held back, some social and intellectual ‘distance’. For it is in the space created by this distance that the analytic work of the ethnographer gets done.” (1995: 115)

Similarly, Noaks and Wincup criticise the notion that ethnographers should be attempting to tell the story of their research from the participants' own perspective:

'Telling it like it is' implies presenting an account of the social world from the perspective of those being researched; telling the story as they would tell it (based on the unlikely assumption that they would all tell the same story). This is an overly *simplistic* view because if an ethnographer were to do this, he or she would have 'gone native', in other words become so immersed in the culture they were studying that they had left their academic culture behind. (2004: 92; cited in Silverman 2006: 98-99)

Literally to 'tell the story as they would tell it' would involve forsaking analytical and theoretical tools, since the research subjects are not likely to draw on these in their narratives. However, it is essential while retaining these tools—and through applying them—to get as close as possible to understanding the experience of those being studied, and respondents do have 'voice' in the research narrative. Thus, the story being told is the perspective of the research subjects from the perspective of the researcher—my story of their story.

The most obvious defining aspect of my identity while in Ghana was my race. At the start of my first experience of Africa, in Togo, I wanted desperately to conceal my white skin, not to be noticed and singled out. Because, unlike in the UK, it is not politically incorrect to call attention to differences in skin colour. Every day I was reminded of that difference by the way I was treated, the way I was spoken to, the way I was expected to act—and by children (and often adults too) calling out "white lady" (*yovo* in Togo; *oburoni* in Ghana) as I passed. In Togo I realised that this is not demonstrative of racial tension, but rather the lack of it: it isn't necessary to try to hide differences. In Ghana I began to understand that the issue is more complex. Tensions *are* embedded within this literally skin-deep difference, but they are not about physiology. Skin colour is symbolic. White skin symbolises privilege, which can be simultaneously aspired to, resented and disdained by people who have little money or employment prospects, are denied visas, struggle for education, feel oppressed by corrupt officials, yet are physically very strong, possess knowledge and skills that most white people do not, and have deep-seated moral and cultural values. It symbolises wealth, opportunity, freedom to travel, education, power, and sometimes oppression and moral laxity. It conveys messages about what you eat and

how (*“Do you know how to eat fufu?”*), which products you buy (*“The whites like this toilet paper because it is soft”*), what kind of work you can or will do (*“Who washes your clothes for you?”*). Some of these messages can be challenged, for instance by demonstrating an ability to eat fufu correctly and by washing one’s own clothes, but others, such as education and freedom to travel, cannot be changed. Moreover, attributes symbolised by white skin are not conditional upon it. Many Ghanaians are also powerful, educated and wealthy with good jobs and the ability to travel, and this difference is also felt.

It is not, then, simply the colour of my skin that determines how I am viewed and treated. I may be spoken to in a certain way because I am educated, not because I am white, but perhaps my white skin acts as an indication of my education. The insistence by members of the MDCC that I sit at the front of the church was not simply down to the colour of my skin, but the fact that I am white acted as an indication of other social differences that, in their view, required me to be placed there, for example that I was a relatively rich and educated stranger who should be shown hospitality and respect.

A second aspect of my identity that proved very significant, particularly given the area of my research, was my religious beliefs. Ghana, like most of Africa, has a virtually 100% belief in God and the south is predominantly Christian. Many of the local population are mystified as to how it is possible for anyone not to believe in God, although they are aware that this is the case for many white people. As a Christian, then, I was accepted into the churches and, as we have seen, encouraged and sometimes directed to take an active role in them. Shared beliefs also, of course, contributed to how I was positioned in social relationships outside church. Regardless of belief, however, attending church demonstrated a willingness and a desire to participate in people’s activities, learn from and with them and associate myself with them.

Some aspects of my identity implied weakness within Ahanta society. In a male-dominated culture where age is respected and the value on producing offspring is high, I was working as a single woman in my late twenties: not old enough to be deferred to but too old to be without children (*“Try to marry because you are getting old”*). Sometimes these ‘weaknesses’, compounded by lack of basic knowledge and



abilities, caused me problems: unwanted attention from men, the necessity to show deference to older people. But often I found advantage in the very vulnerability they produced, leading other people to position me as non-threatening and in need of assistance and information. When you are asking questions about people's lives and need their trust it is important not to be seen as a threat. Often being ignorant or incapable—and willing to ask for help—goes a long way in forming relationships. My 'strengths' (wealth, education, most things encapsulated in being white), although facilitating access to people with high social status, such as church leaders, often turned out as hindrances and barriers to close friendships, underlining differences. For example, my gender allowed me to talk easily to both men and women without the intimidation that could potentially result from the male-female power relationship; rather, it was my education that may have caused more of a barrier, or indeed any aspect of my identity that led people to show me additional respect than would normally be due a woman of my age and thus increase the distance between us. On the other hand, relationships are mutual and I could use my strengths to benefit the people around me just as they used their knowledge and skills to help me. Often this was through financial assistance, for example small gifts of money, payment of medical expenses or schoolbooks, but also helping children to read and write, teenagers with their studies, taking photographs of people or explaining how to use somebody's new camera. The tradition of objectivity that claims that researchers should not get involved with their research subjects and should endeavour to carry out their work without causing any change at all to the environment in which they are working, has been critiqued by the interpretive, the feminist and the postmodern paradigms (Irwin 2006: 157). Without endorsing the deliberate "[c]omplete bodily and emotional immersion" that she identifies in some of the interpretive literature, it would seem that remaining completely detached would not only be a hindrance to research, but also impossible, because simply living in a community inevitably affects people's lives in some way, if not materially or physically then in their thoughts and ideas. However, there is a difference between interacting with people and trying to influence the way they live—and differences in opinions as to the appropriate ethical stance on this (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994: 253; D'Andrade 1995; Scheper-Hughes 1995). When asked to teach the AG adult Sunday School, which precedes the weekly service, I declined, since part of my role as researcher was to observe the teachings of the churches, not to impose my own opinions. However, all members of the congregation are expected to take part in the

discussions which form the basis of the Sunday School, and I did not refuse to participate in this, but rather used it as an opportunity to ask questions and raise issues relevant to my research. To resolve my dilemma over how much to contribute to offerings I compromised by giving equally to each of the two churches, at the high end of the scale but not more than the better-off church members gave, and at the end of my fieldwork made a donation which went towards roofing in one of the churches and chairs in the other.

Referring to research roles, de Laine states:

The researcher takes to the field a bundle of roles that constitute the total social 'me'. Which role will be allowed to assume a master and determining status in any social setting, and which roles are to be relegated subsidiary positions in the repertoire of roles, might be a matter to be negotiated with another / others. (De Laine 2000: 116)

However, the negotiation may not be so much over which role the researcher is allowed to play in any given context as over the construction of the role itself, which must be performed collaboratively by both researcher and research subjects. Whatever the researcher may take to the field, once she is there her identity is modified in relation to her social environment. Rather than being reorganised within a fixed repertoire, roles become fluid and ambiguous as the constituent elements of identity through which they are constructed are renegotiated.

Discussions of research roles in participant observation generally focus on the question of which role it is appropriate for the fieldworker to adopt in a given context for a given purpose. The roles identified within each of the models outlined earlier are sometimes portrayed as costumes ready to be put on according to the researcher's wishes. Here I am shifting the focus to how the role of the participant-observer is determined, rather than on why the fieldworker should adopt a particular role. This draws attention to the different factors that contribute to the construction of research roles: the level of knowledge and understanding that the researcher has of the events and processes taking place around her; the ability of the research subjects to decide the involvement of the researcher; and the ability of the researcher to decide her own participation. These decisions are based on the construction of the relationships between the researcher and the people she is studying, which in turn are based on the

complex interplay of various aspects of her identity, constantly renegotiated within a framework of social difference.

### **Part 3: Negotiating Data Analysis and Narrative**

The process of negotiation continued into the analysis and writing, or ‘cooling down, illumination and formulation or completion’ (Janesick 2003) stage of the research: once the data collection was completed, back in the UK the focus turned to formulating and presenting the narrative of the thesis. NVivo was used to code the transcribed data, an exercise which enhanced my familiarity with the data as well as acting as an indexing system for easy retrieval. The process of coding to some extent reflected the ethnographic process discussed above, beginning with a wide range of topics, or ‘nodes’—substantive, case-related and conceptual—which were progressively funnelled into the underlying themes of the thesis. NVivo itself, however, remained basically an organisational tool: the identification and development of emergent patterns and relationships between categories was achieved through extended reflection on and questioning of the data in the light of related literature and discussions with others.

The development of the narrative was not a linear process. Rather than analysis, formulation of argument and writing taking place in sequence, it was often during the process of concretising ideas on paper that their details and implications (for other parts of the thesis as well as for the particular chapter in question) became apparent, which frequently led back to further interrogation of the data as well as engagement with other bodies of literature. Nor was it entirely objective. Just as in the development of the research question and the data collection, my own background, identity and concerns inevitably influenced my interpretation of the data, decisions over which areas to develop more fully in the narrative, and the presentation of the story itself. As Stacey notes, “With very rare exceptions it is the researcher who narrates, who ‘authors’ the ethnography. In the last instance an ethnography is a written document structured primarily by a researcher’s purposes, offering a researcher’s interpretation, registered in a researcher’s voice” (Stacey 1988: 23; cited in Sparkes 1994: 173). However, as Sparkes acknowledges, drawing on the work of Richardson (1990), “while all knowledge is partial, embodied, and historically and

culturally situated, this does not mean that there is no knowledge or that situated knowledge is bad” (Sparkes 1994: 175). It does, however, mean that the situation of the knowledge must be recognised: the story told in the pages of this thesis is, ultimately, from the perspective of a white, British, middle-class, young, Christian, female researcher, with all the baggage that those terms represent and all the complexities and experiences they conceal. It is an account of her experiences, observations and interactions within a specific Ghanaian community as she attempts to gain an understanding of reality as lived by its residents. The challenge then becomes to represent this understanding accurately in text, using the language of social science to portray lived experience.

This challenge is all the more demanding when the area of study is not entirely a social matter. The study of religion has always been a contested area within the social sciences, due to its nature of reaching beyond society to forces that are not necessarily subject to social laws and norms. As noted in Chapter 1 (p.13), modern social science grew out of Enlightenment thinking, based on reason and rationality. Religion, therefore, associated with mysticism and the irrational, had either to be confined to a separate discipline—theology—or to be explained in terms which fit the dominant paradigm. Thus in the social sciences religion has tended to be ‘explained away’ in terms of, for example, psychoanalysis (Freud); intellectualism (Frazer); structuralism (Lévi-Strauss); neurology (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1988; Newberg, d’Aquili & Rause 2002; Persinger 1987); functionalism (Durkheim, Malinowski); historical materialism (Marx, Weber); structural functionalism (Radcliffe-Brown)<sup>15</sup>. Such approaches analyse and explain the social and psychological aspects of religion and may therefore constitute satisfactory accounts from the perspective of rational social science; however, they may not be satisfactory or sufficient from the point of view of the adherents of religions, precisely because the limits and underlying premises of their disciplines do not allow them to explain religion in religious terms.

Attempts to ‘explain’ religion with social science are therefore intrinsically problematic. In this thesis, then, the question I seek to answer is not ‘why religion?’ or even ‘what is religion?’, but ‘how religion?’: how Ghanaian people experience

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<sup>15</sup> See Eller 2004, pp.13-28 for an overview of different social science approaches to religion.

religion in their everyday lives. The crucial task is to render a faithful representation of how religion is played out in an African society, in terms meaningful to a social science readership in the UK. An obvious place to start would be with a definition; however definitions of religion are themselves problematic. Firstly, although most definitions are now more inclusive and less Eurocentric than that given by the 1990 edition of the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*: “human recognition of superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God entitled to obedience”; the sheer variety of religious traditions and experience across the world and throughout history make the task of encapsulating what is common to all of them extremely difficult. Indeed, Asad argues, “there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes” (Asad 1993: 29). Moreover, there is a great deal of ambiguity and disagreement regarding what religion should or should not include. As Eller observes,

Clearly, scholars do not agree precisely how to begin to talk about this thing called religion. They emphasize different aspects of it: Is it fundamentally belief and ideas, or ritual, or feeling, or morality, or community? Further, they introduce other terms in the definition that plunge us into a definitional spiral: What is ‘spirit,’ ‘divine,’ ‘belief,’ ‘sacred,’ or ‘holy’? Finally, does it refer to something real ‘out there’ or merely something ‘inside us’? (Eller 2004: 8)

This ambiguity and difference of opinion is not solely between scholars. Research participants also have views on what is or is not religion, which may not concur with definitions given by researchers. Social scientists have, in their quest for universality, become more and more broad and inclusive in their definitions, for example Edwards’ “the sum total of answers we give to the problem of our relationship with the universe” (cited by Robinson 2007). Others are more specific, such as Ellis and Ter Haar who base their study of religion and politics in Africa “on the notion that religion refers to a belief in the existence of an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible one, that is home to spiritual beings with effective powers over the material world” (2004: 14). Even this, however, does not necessarily reflect the ideas of the people represented by their work. One participant in my study, for example, when asked about ‘traditional religion’ replied, “that is not religion, that is the gods”, asserting that ‘religion’ is about Christianity. Others have different ideas,

and one of the issues facing researchers is the diversity of attitudes and opinions among their respondents.

The task of the researcher in this situation can be understood as similar to that of a translator. The eternal dilemma facing translators is the tension between the source language and the target language. A translator usually aims to reproduce the original text as closely as possible. However, word-for-word translations may be linguistically accurate but fail to communicate the style, tone, register and mood of the original. Metaphors may not make sense in the target culture and concepts or objects may not exist. The translator is thus caught between the two languages, facing a choice between being faithful to the source language and culture by taking a literal approach, and being faithful to the target language and culture by aiming at a more natural translation and communicating the sense of the text in a way that is more meaningful to the reader. To take the example of the Bible, a text that continues to be translated in diverse ways, this is the difference between the *Revised Standard Version*, a literal translation, and *The Message* (Peterson 2002), a paraphrase aiming at maximum relevance to Western Anglophone society in the twenty-first century. As Ortega y Gasset puts it, “a translation can move in either of two directions: either the author is brought to the language of the reader, or the reader is carried to the language of the author” (1937: 60). Moreover, the identity of the translator also impacts the translation. As Gentzler argues, no translator is ever neutral, thus “[m]arking one’s position as a translator, as a mediating subject, is an important part of postcolonial translation” (2002: 209).

In researching religion within the social sciences I am caught in a similar tension to that of the translator: between accurately representing the perspectives of the people I am studying and communicating this in a way that is meaningful to and engages with the world of social science. For this reason, although the thesis remains within the domain of social science, I have deliberately chosen not to draw my boundaries with a definition of religion. Instead I began with a phenomenon, the growth of Christianity in Ghana and more specifically the churches in the village at the centre of the study, and my focus rests on the story of people within and around those churches. In investigating and narrating this story I have both narrowed the scope of the study—for example to focus on two particular churches—and widened it to include elements—such as witchcraft—that some (whether academics or

participants) may not designate as 'religious' but without which the story would be incomplete.

## Conclusion

The process of this research project, throughout its design, implementation, analysis and narration, has been one of continual negotiation and renegotiation. Firstly, the design of the research and the development of the question have meant negotiating between my own previous experiences and interests, other people's ideas as set out in academic literature, the advice of my supervisors and the nature of the field, in both practical and conceptual terms. Secondly, the data collection entailed continual negotiation between different potential directions for the research and, most importantly, negotiation with people as we engaged with each other on a daily basis and mutually constructed our roles both in each others' lives and in the research. What I brought to the field in terms of my own identity and how I managed that within the field was crucial, but it is clear that I did not have complete control to choose my research role or to carry out my fieldwork exactly as I pleased: I was working within the limits of my own knowledge and understanding, the terms set out by my research subjects, and the wider social structures within which the terms of relationships are negotiated. Finally, analysing the data and developing and writing a coherent argument has involved negotiation between different elements and themes arising from the data; between the data itself and other analyses in the literature; as well as between my own thoughts and concerns and suggestions from others. Moreover, it has meant developing a narrative which, while engaging with a social science readership also remains true to the experiences and perceptions of those whose stories it tells.

The underlying theme of negotiation in the methodology of this thesis, and the ambiguity, fluidity and uncertainty which it entails, are intrinsically related to the research question itself. In seeking to reach and to understand the 'everyday' it has been necessary to enter into the complexity and messiness of everyday life. Thus, the process of the research cannot be separated from its substance: each to some extent reflects and informs the other. Terms such as ambiguity, multiplicity, fluidity,

relatedness and negotiation are not only key to understanding the methodology but are also central to the story told by the data, set out in the chapters that follow.



## Ndwumizili: The Village and its Churches

### Introduction

*It's 7:30am. A four month old baby boy lies on a mat, gurgling up at the leaves of an avocado tree that protect him from the sun. A few feet away his mother perches on a low wooden stool, surrounded by basins and buckets of water as she performs the daily chore of washing clothes. She shoos away a goat and glances up as her eldest son, seven years old, passes through the courtyard carrying on his head a bucket of water that he has brought from the well. Vultures watch from coconut trees opposite the house as he unloads it, strips off his clothes and energetically proceeds to envelop himself in soapsuds, standing on a concrete slab outside the house at the side of the unpaved road. His cousin is already dressed for school in her perfectly ironed yellow blouse and brown pinafore dress; she shrieks and giggles as he flicks water on her, drawing a reprimand from a woman passing by. (Ndwumizili, October 2006)*

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the setting of this study. I start by giving a brief profile of the village in terms of its geography, population, history, economy, infrastructure and facilities, institutions, administration and culture. I then narrow the focus to the local church context, describing the Christian landscape within the community and the characteristics of the different types of churches. Finally I introduce the two churches on which this study concentrates: the Musama Disco Christo Church and the Assemblies of God Church. A picture of the congregations in Ndwumizili is built up, including their history, composition, leadership, activities and style of worship.

## Ndwumizili

The avocado tree in the shade of which the baby lies grows in the centre of the enclosed concrete courtyard of the house, onto which all the rooms of the ground floor open. This is where much of daily life takes place: where babies are bathed, clothes are washed, food is cooked, hair is braided and homework is pored over. This is where people sit and talk, where traders and children discharge from their heads loads of cooked food, fresh and dried fish, bread, bananas, printed and woven cloth, jewellery and second-hand clothes as they meander through the village, calling out to advertise their wares. Much of the trading in the village takes place like this: although several small shops sell general goods there is no marketplace to speak of. The economy is based on agriculture and crops cultivated by the local population, including cassava, pepper, tomatoes, onions, garden eggs<sup>16</sup>, okra, oil palms, sugar cane, bananas, plantain bananas, coconuts, pineapples and citrus fruits. These are generally used for subsistence or traded at local markets, primarily at the district capital, Kwenu. Palm fruit, however, is mass-cultivated for oil production, both for consumption within Ghana and for export to other countries. Coconut production was also previously a major economic activity until several years ago when a blight, which continues to spread westwards along the coast, destroyed thousands of coconut trees in the area.

The village of Ndwumizili is situated in the Ahanta West district of Ghana's Western Region, approximately 250 kilometres west of Accra and an hour's journey from Sekondi-Takoradi, the regional capital and Ghana's third largest city (see Map 4.1). Due to its location on the coast, fishing and the preparation of fish, for instance smoking and drying, are important economic activities, with most of the fish (tuna, herring, barracuda, snapper, silverfish etc.) taken to be sold at market. As with agricultural crops this is usually at Kwenu, located a few kilometres inland on the main coast road traversing Ghana, and so much fish is taken there that villagers often complain they cannot find any to buy in Ndwumizili. However, Ndwumizili's fishing industry is tiny compared with that of neighbouring Eleni, a larger village one kilometre to the west with a harbour instead of a beach. A large proportion of Ndwumizili's fishermen come from Moree and Shama in the Central Region,

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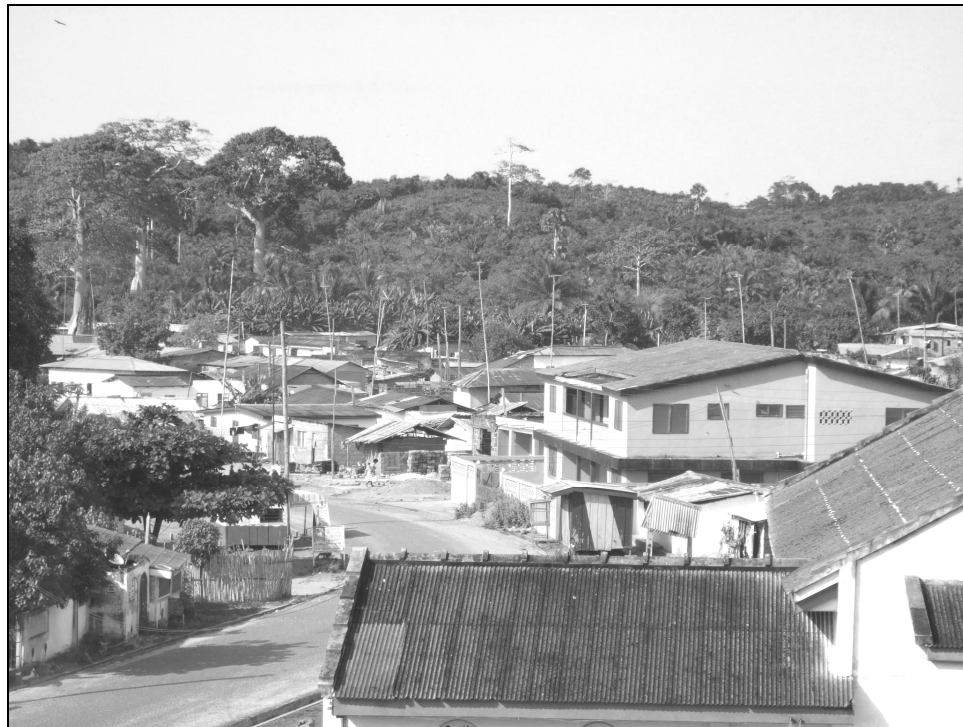
<sup>16</sup> A type of aubergine.

migrating to Ndwumizili for the fishing season between October and February before returning home.

Tourism is another significant industry in this small village on the edge of the Gulf of Guinea. The house lived in by the mother and her two children has the word 'Homestay' painted in large red letters on the white external wall. It is a large house by village standards, having gradually expanded over a period of some decades from a collection of huts to a two-storey concrete building, which houses a continually changing mixture of extended family relations: at the time of writing, seven adults, three teenagers and eight children, plus one *oburoni* (white person, me), a pharmacy and two guest rooms for visitors to the village who cannot afford or do not want to pay the higher rates at other hotels. Ndwumizili's two-kilometre sandy bay is well-known, attracting a constant trickle of both Ghanaian and expatriate visitors, and there are several places to stay in the village, ranging from the plush 'Ndwumizili Beach Resort' to small—and much less plush—homestays, like this one. A good deal of the land along this part of Ghana's coastline continues to be bought up by Europeans, North Americans and Australasians for holiday homes and hotels. In Ndwumizili the tourist industry is an important source of employment, although few of the higher positions requiring secondary or tertiary education are occupied by local people.

The women and children living in this house are lucky: there is a well just outside their gate so they do not have far to walk to fetch water. Since Ndwumizili has no pipe-borne water, with the exception of the middle and upper range hotels, which have their own water tanks and pumps, most of the rest of the village relies on a few public and private wells. World Vision has constructed two boreholes in the village, but neither is functioning: one is broken down and the other is no longer used because the water is salty. Few households possess their own toilet and there are only two public toilet blocks to serve the entire community. There is, however, an electricity supply, to which many of the houses in the village are connected, despite the frequent power failures ("light off"). The rainy seasons, of which the major falls in June and July and the minor in September and October, are the worst time for power cuts, although for several months from August 2006 low levels of the Volta Dam resulted in 12-hour scheduled cuts, which occurred every three days on a rotary basis affecting the whole country.

**Picture 4.1: Ndwumizili, view from hotel roof looking west.**



As well as the dirt road which the terrace of the house overlooks and beside which the boy is bathing, there are two paved roads in the village (see Map 4.2). One runs parallel to the seashore, on which the majority of tourist accommodation is located (it leads directly to the gate of the largest hotel), and the other comes from Kwenu to form a T-junction with the first, where the taxi station is located. The unpaved road leads to Eleni, branching west off the Kwenu road as it enters the village and crossing the lagoon on the west side of Ndwumizili. Between and around these three roads lies a seemingly disorganised tangle of houses, a mixture of mud and thatch buildings alongside concrete structures with corrugated iron roofs, in some places so close as to allow only narrow passageways between them, in other places surrounded by enough land to grow crops.

Communication systems are limited. There is no post office and few telephones: a couple of small ‘commercial communication centres’ exist from which phone calls can be made. There is, however, increasing mobile phone coverage (and use), and the internet can be accessed (when it is working) from the largest hotel at ten times the price of internet cafés in Takoradi. An hourly bus service to Kwenu via Eleni has recently been established, competing with the shared taxis which ply between

Ndwumizili and Kwenu as frequently as it takes to fill them with passengers. Few of the villagers own private cars.

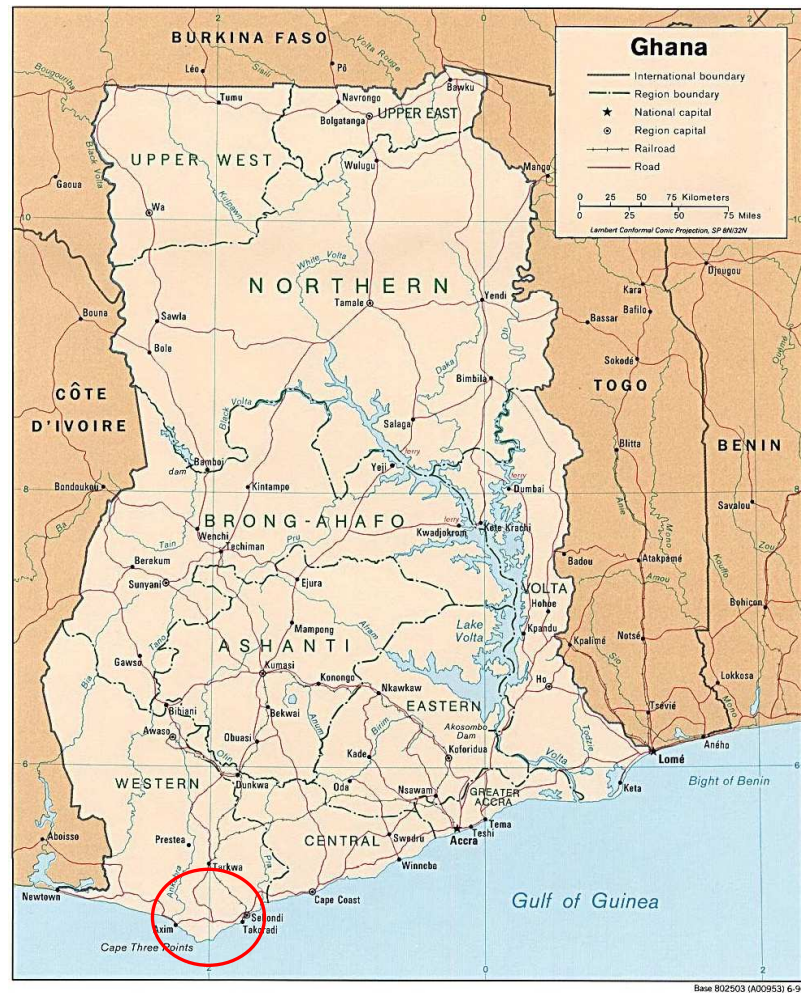
Health and education facilities are also limited. The nearest doctor can be found at the hospital in Eleni; in Ndwumizili a basic pharmacy is run by a great-aunt of these children, a former nurse. Once the boy is dressed in his uniform the children will make their way between the houses and along the road to the school, five minutes' walk away. Established by the Methodist Church and a local businessman and run by the state<sup>17</sup>, the school consists of a Kindergarten, Primary and Junior Secondary School (JSS) and caters for around 600 children. Basic education in Ghana is now free and compulsory, although in Ndwumizili on any given school morning dozens of children can be seen playing or working in the village and on the beach.

During their first few years of school the children learn in Fante, the dominant language of the coastal area between Accra and Takoradi, before switching to English. Fante is also the language they speak at home, although it is not the local language of the village. Most of the population of Ndwumizili are Ahanta, one of Ghana's smaller ethnic groups. They are related to the majority Akan people who cover most of the south of Ghana (and to which the Fante belong); however, the Ahantas insist strongly on their distinct identity from the Akan group and indeed from all other ethnicities. They take pride in claiming Ahanta to be one of the hardest languages in Ghana, in particular that most Ahanta people can understand Fante as a second language and also Nzema, to which their language is closely related, but neither Nzemas nor Fantes (nor any other group) can understand Ahanta.

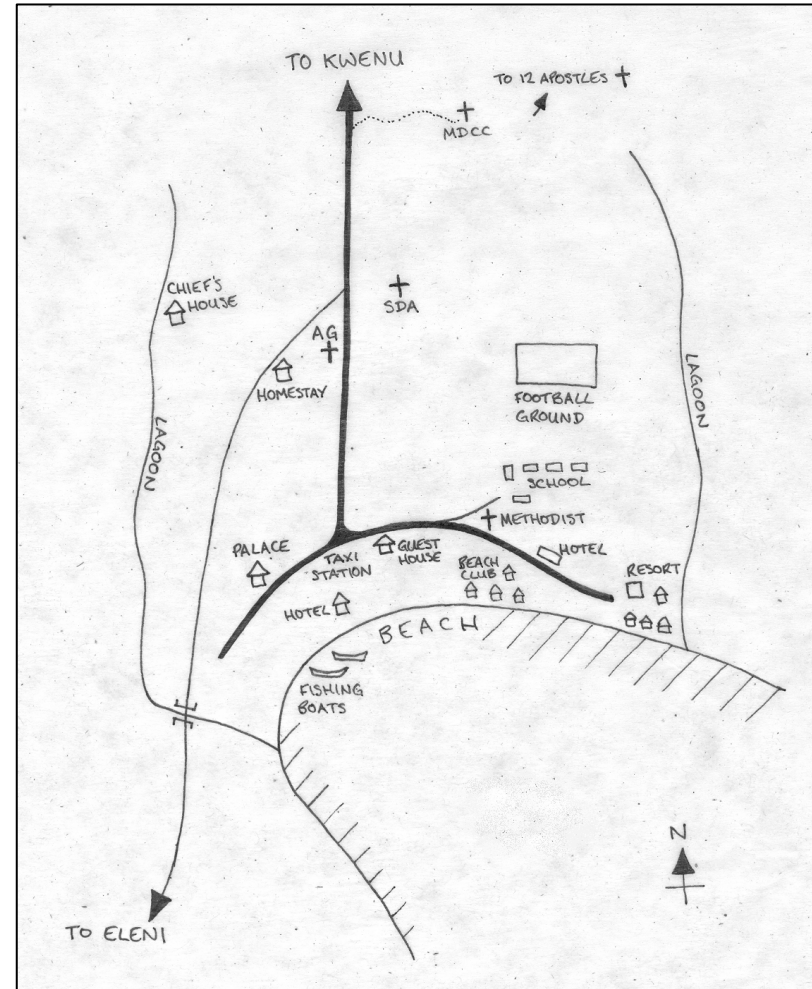
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<sup>17</sup> At the time of this research (2005-06) the state is in the process of returning management of schools back to churches.

**Map 4.1: Location of Ndwumizili.**



**Map 4.2: Ndwumizili (not to scale).**



The Ahantas migrated from what is now the Ivory Coast several hundred years ago. Local tradition has it that Baidoo Bonsoe, the King of Ahanta, dipped his sword into the Ankobra and Pra rivers (see Map 4.1) and claimed the land in between as his. The boundaries have narrowed since then, officially becoming the Ahanta East and Ahanta West districts of the Western Region of Ghana. Members of other ethnicities have also settled in the village, most significantly Fantes and Nzemas, who occupy the neighbouring land west of the Ahanta area.<sup>18</sup> The boy's mother was born in Takoradi and, although her father is Ahanta her mother is from the Eastern Region where the language is mutually intelligible with Fante but not Ahanta, with the result that she speaks Ahanta only poorly.

Despite the hetero-ethnic nature of the village, Ahanta customs prevail. The main cultural event of the Ahanta calendar, also shared by the neighbouring Nzemas, is called 'Kundum', a harvest festival celebrated annually in September. The origins of Kundum are unclear, but according to tradition it is celebrated to commemorate the first successful maize harvest in Ahanta, maize being the main staple. In 2005 the festival in Ndwumizili was cancelled to make way for the funeral of a member of the royal family, and again in 2006 it was called off due to similar circumstances. Rites of passage such as baby 'outdooing' (naming) ceremonies and female puberty rites are also normally observed, although with variations in practice. Financial constraints mean that these ceremonies are sometimes delayed, combined for two or more members of a family, or skipped completely. The one rite that is never omitted (unless as a severe penalty) is the funeral of a dead person. As with other rites of passage, the traditions involved in funerals have evolved over time. Reflecting wider changes throughout Ghana, they have become (in most cases) massively expensive gatherings of extended family members which involve, among other things, the hiring of music bands, DJs and enormous banks of speakers; printed programmes, posters, T-shirts and videos (both shots of the events and movies for entertainment).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The population appears to be rising: in December 2005 the district assembly put the population of Ndwumizili at 1,976, up from 1,385 according to census data in 2000. It is not clear how the more recent figure was arrived at. It is a significant increase even if it includes the fishermen who migrate from the Central Region for a few months each year.

<sup>19</sup> See De Witte (2001, 2003) for analysis of changing funerals and the dynamic between money and death in Ghana.

Ndwumizili is governed by a combination of the traditional Ahanta chieftaincy, which is inherited through a matrilineal system, and the Ghanaian state government, of which the elected assemblyman is the local representative. On a basic level, most changes in the village must be approved by both bodies, and the chief has the right to veto initiatives introduced by the assemblyman. In everyday conversation the chief is referred to far more often than the assemblyman, particularly because it is to the chief that disputes are taken to be settled, and it is the chief who has authority over all requests relating to the distribution and use of land in the village. Across Ghana, chieftaincy remains an important and contested institution: disputes over chieftaincy positions are widespread, frequent and often extremely violent, while on a political level and in the media there is continued debate over the relevance of such an institution in contemporary Ghana.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from these institutions of authority, Ndwumizili possesses few organisations. Christianity is the only world religion present in the village, represented by eleven churches of various denominations and sizes, each with its own internal groups and societies such as women's and youth fellowships. In addition, the non-denominational Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) has a language project based in the village. The six staff, of whom five are Ahanta and one (the manager) from the Volta Region in the east of Ghana, work throughout the Ahanta area on Bible translation, evangelism, Ahanta literacy and gender issues. Other NGO activity has been from World Vision which has an office in Kwenu and through which Ndwumizili benefited from two boreholes (as mentioned above, now disused) and renovation of the school about ten years ago. World Vision also runs a child sponsorship scheme in the village, as does a Slovenian NGO, Humanitas. There is also a football club with junior and senior teams, a transport (taxi) union, and some of the tourist accommodation providers have recently got together to form an association amongst themselves.

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<sup>20</sup> See for example articles such as 'Help curb chieftaincy disputes – Veep', Ghana News Agency, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007, <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=134403>.



**Picture 4.2: Ndwumizili school.**



**Picture 4.3: Children fetching water from a public well.**



**Picture 4.4: Selling meat pies along the beach.**



**Picture 4.5: Carrying sugarcane back from the farm.**



## **Local Church Context**

### ***Overview***

There are eleven churches in Ndwumizili, all of different denominations, plus a small group of Jehovah's Witnesses. The churches fall into three of Foli's classes (Foli 2001): 'The Historic Churches' (Methodist, Roman Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist); 'The Pentecostal Churches' (Church of Pentecost, Deeper Life Bible Church, Assemblies of God, Christ Apostolic Church, Christ Bethel Mission International and the Action Church); and 'The Independent 'Spiritual' Churches' (Musama Disco Christo Church and Church of the Twelve Apostles). Of the remaining two categories, 'Other Mission-Related Churches' and 'The Independent 'Charismatic' Churches', we have seen in Chapter 2 (pp.31-32) that the former target mainly northerners and the latter are found predominantly in the urban centres, emanating from the mega churches in Accra.

Quantifying Christianity in Ndwumizili (or anywhere else) is not a simple matter. The national rate of 69% mentioned in Chapter 2 comes from census data and therefore represents (with all the limitations of this kind of data) people's self-identification as Christians. Church records tell a very different story, including further distinction between membership and attendance rates. A rough indication of the disparity between approximate membership numbers as given by church leaders and observed church attendance are shown in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1: Church membership numbers and attendance rates in Ndwumizili**

Church	Adult membership	Adult attendance
Methodist	80	40 female 10 male
Seventh Day Adventist (SDA)	70	45
Roman Catholic	30+	12 female 2 male
Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC)	39 female 10 male	20 female 2 male
Church of the Twelve Apostles	65	30
Church of Pentecost	50+	60
Assemblies of God (AG)	20	10 female 8 male
Deeper Life Bible Church	12	3 female 5 male
Christ Bethel Mission International	20	3 female 3 male
Christ Apostolic Church	18	6 female 3 male
Action Church	10	0
Total	351	261

Using a very crude calculation based on UNDP human development indicators for Ghana, of a population of nearly 2000, of which 39.5% are likely to be under the age of 15, it would seem that around 30% of the adults are members of local churches, while less than 20% attend church regularly. On the other hand, I did not manage to find anyone in the village who did not associate themselves with one church or another, which indicates that the influence of the churches spreads a lot more widely than formal membership (it may also indicate that many do not find formal membership important or desirable). It should also be noted that some villagers, whether or not they actually attend, identify themselves as belonging to branches of churches in other villages, some of which are also represented in Ndwumizili and some of which are not .

Table 4.2 contains a summary of the various churches in Ndwumizili. The most striking feature of the church landscape shown here is the sheer number of churches.

In a village of less than 2000 people, eleven churches appears remarkably high. Such numbers are not, however, uncommon in southern Ghana and when set in the context of the literature reviewed in the previous chapter which records recent dramatic growth of Christianity, they do not appear out of place. Accounts of this growth place it mainly within the Pentecostal sector, which is reflected in the histories of the churches in Ndwumizili: all six Pentecostal churches are relatively recent plants, being established (or re-established, in the case of the AG which was a mission church when it was first planted in 1957) in the village since 1995. The two AICs both date from the 1950s and 60s, which concurs with the historical rise of this type of church around the achievement of Ghana's independency. The mission churches are more varied: while the Methodist church was established in the missionary era of the nineteenth century, the Seventh Day Adventist church did not appear on the scene until 1980. The Catholic church, despite being the oldest and largest single denomination in Ghana, is a very recent presence in Ndwumizili, started in 2001 by an elderly priest whose family come from the village.

While numbers and types of churches concur with the general view of church trends in Ghana, membership rates reveal a different picture. Rather than declining, the AICs still form large congregations and the MDCC, at least, is growing. The Pentecostal churches, on the other hand, share a very small proportion of the population, counting less than 150 members between the six of them. This may reflect the rural setting of this study: most literature draws on studies of urban areas where the relatively wealthy and educated tend to live. Furthermore, the Pentecostal churches are still young and it is possible that with time they may expand their membership rates. However, it appears that the Pentecostal sector is becoming ever more fragmented. Despite great similarities in their organisation, teaching, activities, practices and worship style, there is no inclination to merge: rather, churches hold tightly to their denominational identity. Many denominations have their origins in dispute and division: the Church of Pentecost, Christ Apostolic Church and Christ Bethel all broke away from other churches as a result of internal conflict over politics or doctrine. The recent proliferation of churches in Ndwumizili, however, has been due to the introduction of church plants. Most of these appear to form part of a deliberate strategy of expansion by their parent churches, while some (Deeper Life and Action, as well as SDA) were founded by existing members of those churches in other places, who either set up a new branch on moving to Ndwumizili or already

lived in the village and decided to create a branch closer to home instead of continuing to travel to attend meetings. Although several of the churches hold their meetings in school classrooms<sup>21</sup>, virtually all the churches in the village are at some stage of acquiring land and constructing their own buildings (or, if their church is complete, embarking on further building plans such as residential quarters for the minister). At the level of church leaders, denominational identity appears stronger than geographical links: churches of different denominations in the village rarely or never hold joint services or activities, while it is common for churches to join with another or others of the same denomination in a different village for special meetings. However, among the rank and file denominational identity is not so binding: as we will see later in the thesis, switching between churches or attending more than one church simultaneously is common.

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<sup>21</sup> At the very end of the fieldwork period of this research, in October 2006, despite the government returning the running of some schools to religious bodies, churches across Ghana were banned from using school classrooms as venues for meetings. Reasons include concerns over spiritual ‘hauntings’ as well as displacement of furniture and wall displays.

**Table 4.2: Overview of churches in Ndwumizili**

Name of church	Class	Denomination origins	Year founded in Ndwumizili	Members	Approximate attendance	Location	Leadership
Methodist	Historic/mission	European mission (1835)	1875	80	50	Own building (complete), next to school	Caretaker and steward, resident
Roman Catholic	Historic/mission	European mission (1880)	2001	30+	14	School classroom	Ordained priest, non-resident
Seventh Day Adventist (SDA)	Historic/mission	US mission (1894)	1980	70	45	Own building (nearly complete), main road into village	Local leadership team, resident
Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC)	Spiritual/AIC	Ghanaian indigenous (split from Methodist) (1922)	1964	49	22	Own building (incomplete), outskirts of village off main road	Ordained pastor, resident (until June 2006); non-resident (post-June 2006)
Church of the 12 Apostles (Nackabah)	Spiritual/AIC	Ghanaian indigenous (independent prophets, c.1914)	1950s	65	30	Own building (complete), outskirts of village	Prophetess, resident
Church of Pentecost	Pentecostal	Split from Apostolic Church (1953)	1996	50+	60	School classroom	Presiding elder, non-resident
Assemblies of God (AG)	Pentecostal	US mission (1931)	1957 (restarted 2001)	20	18	Own building (semi-complete, main road)	Ordained pastor, resident
Deeper Life Bible Church	Pentecostal	From Nigeria (1978)	2004	12	8	School classroom	Elder, resident
Christ Apostolic Church	Pentecostal	Split from Apostolic Church (1939)	2001	18	9	School classroom	Elder, non-resident
Christ Bethel Mission International	Pentecostal	Split from Apostolic Reformed Church (1996)	1998	20	6	School classroom	Elder, non-resident; deacon, resident
Action Church	Pentecostal	Ghanaian indigenous (1948)	1995	10	0 (no longer functioning)	School classroom	Elder, resident

None of the churches in Ndwumizili except the Church of the Twelve Apostles has its own, exclusive pastor. The Catholic, MDC and AG churches are led by ordained pastors who also have responsibility for branches in other places, while the remaining eight are in the charge of local elders or leadership teams, visited occasionally by their ministers who may oversee up to 16 different churches. Although some denominations have a centralised salary structure, as members of the laity elders are unpaid and able to claim only expenses. MDCC and AG pastors are not salaried and are thus dependent on support from their congregations. This system is common in Ghana and has contributed to growing cynicism in the media and among the general public towards pastors perceived as growing rich from the contributions of church members who themselves struggle to make ends meet. ‘Church is business’ is a phrase commonly heard, and the immoral accumulation and use of money by unscrupulous pastors (including those who charge extortionate rates for prayer and miracles and those who are not endorsed by any church body but simply set up on their own) is a matter discussed almost daily on radio programmes and in newspapers. However, although this issue was mentioned often by respondents in Ndwumizili, it was never in relation to either the MDCC or the AG churches. Indeed, the sums of money collected from these two small and very poor congregations are so miniscule that it is impossible for the respective pastors to survive on them. Both are dependent on incomes from other sources: the MDCC pastor runs a pharmacy and guest house and the wife of the AG pastor is a teacher at the local secondary school.

Churches in Ghana tend to be very centralised, with each local branch in theory following the same weekly programme of activities as all the other branches in the denomination to which it belongs. In practice this does not always work out due to low attendance rates and lack of resources. Most of these activities are in-house meetings focussed on the church population itself (or a specific sector of it), including prayer meetings, Bible studies, women’s fellowship, singing band practice, youth meetings and leadership meetings. Activities reaching out from the churches to the community mainly consist of evangelistic efforts and events: for example, most churches occasionally hold a ‘crusade’—an evening evangelistic meeting or series of meetings held in the centre of the village, involving lots of dancing, with music and preaching broadcast through loudspeakers. The key method through which churches see themselves as serving the community is through prayer. The AG pastor is often



visited by villagers from outside his congregation requesting prayer for a variety of matters; the Church of Pentecost has a 'prayer camp' near a neighbouring village which is staffed 24 hours a day for those seeking healing or solutions to other problems; the MDCC sees healing as its central ministry. Although on a national level most denominations are involved in some kind of social action, for example providing hospitals, schools or vocational training, or making donations to such work, in the village material aid is mostly given on an *ad hoc* basis: as and when serious need arises churches may organise themselves to contribute towards medical care, clothing, childcare or other appropriate assistance.

Churches vary in their style of worship along broadly sectoral lines. The Methodist congregation meets in a Western style church building with a capacity of around 150, complete with wooden pews and stained glass windows. Services also resemble Western churches in other respects: the leading choristers wear gowns and mortar boards and process in and out of the church to mark the beginning and end of the service; canticles and liturgy are recited; hymns are sung from the Methodist Hymn Book (Twi/Fante version) to music played on an electric keyboard and a Western drum kit, and prayers are said by one person at a time while the congregation listens in silence. The SDA church also uses an official hymn book, and prayer (never in tongues) is also led from the front and carried out silently on the part of the congregation. The Catholic church is smaller but, similar to the Methodist church, the service is formed around an oral liturgical structure, with prayers, responses and chants recited by heart. All three of these churches also include praise and worship times when the congregation dances to Ghanaian songs accompanied by African drums. Elements such as this have now become integrated into worship in historic churches, partly in response to the growth and popularity of their Pentecostal counterparts, for whom they are the norm.

Pentecostal services follow a fairly uniform pattern with slight variations. Standard elements include praise songs; testimonies of God's blessings; singing led by a worship leader (usually female); a sermon; prayer; the collection of tithes and offerings; announcements, usually centred on church finances; and a final prayer for protection and benediction. Worship is noisy: there is usually a great deal of loud singing and dancing, accompanied by drums if the churches have them. Most prayers are uttered aloud and simultaneously by the entire congregation, the topics directed

by a leader. Religious symbolism is kept to a minimum: instead of the crosses and candles found on the tables at the front of mission churches and AICs, one is likely to see an arrangement of synthetic flowers. Fixed ritual and liturgy are also frowned upon and (as is also the case in the SDA), pastors and leaders wear smart shirts and suits rather than clerical robes.

Ritual and symbolism are essential parts of the meetings of the MDC and Twelve Apostles churches. The latter was founded in the early twentieth century by Grace Tani and John Nackabah, converts of Prophet William Wade Harris, who converted thousands of people to Christianity over the course of his travels between 1913 and 1915 (see Chapter 2 p.31). It is now commonly known as ‘Nackabah Church’ (or simply ‘Nackabah’). It places strong emphasis on healing, visions and rituals using staffs, calabashes and the Bible and meets on Fridays as well as Sundays, in its own concrete building on the outskirts of the village. While MDCC members wear white, the identifying colour of Twelve Apostles members is red. Both churches use a great deal of oral liturgy and chants, and both employ singing, dancing and drumming to invoke the Holy Spirit, sometimes achieving trance-like states.

## **The Musama Disco Christo and Assemblies of God Churches**

This study focuses on two of these eleven churches: the Musama Disco Christo Church and the Assemblies of God Church. The two churches have very different histories in this village and their respective memberships are largely drawn from different sectors of the population. They fall in separate categories in typologies of African churches, the MDCC being an indigenous or ‘spiritual’ church (which according to literature (Gifford 2004a: 38) are declining in Ghana) and the AG Pentecostal (which are growing (*ibid.*: 38)), thus on doctrinal and historical levels as well as in their practices they differ vastly, chiefly regarding their view of and engagement with culture and modernity. This will be discussed in the next chapter; here I introduce the local churches and their membership, activities and style of worship.

## ***Musama Disco Christo Church***

**Picture 4.6: MDCC building.**



The Musama Disco Christo Church is one of the oldest Ghanaian-initiated churches in Ndwumizili. Its headquarters is at Mozano in the Central Region, the ‘holy city’ and site of the original church which was founded around 1922 by Prophet Jemisemiham Jehu-Appiah, Akaboha I. Previously a catechist in the Methodist Church, he was expelled for placing too much emphasis on the Holy Spirit, particularly on healing and miracles. While such activities have now become far more widespread in Ghanaian churches (particularly among Pentecostals), the MDCC continues to face criticism and accusations of syncretism and ‘not being properly Christian’ due to the importance it places on adapting worship to local cultural traditions. Some of the church’s practices and doctrines are frowned upon by other churches, for example the ritual of animal sacrifice and the strong belief in angels with specific roles. The church has been facing some serious internal problems over the past few years: in 2006 its leader, Prophet Miritaiah-Jonah Jehu-Appiah, Akaboha III (grandson of the founder) and General Head Prophet, was dismissed over allegations of sexual misconduct, and at the end of the fieldwork period of this research (October 2006) the church was in the process of selecting a new leader.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 5 (pp.147-157) for a more detailed discussion of MDCC history, doctrine and practice.

Local branches of the MDCC are referred to as 'stations'. The station in Ndwumizili was started in 1964 and currently has nearly 100 members (40 female, 10 male, 22 junior female and 19 junior male), although not all attend regularly and a typical Sunday morning service attracts a congregation of 30-40. Most have very low incomes, through activities such as smoking fish, preparing palm oil and selling food; several are wives of fishermen. Very few have more than a few years of primary education and most are illiterate. For most of the period of this study the station was the responsibility of a female pastor resident in the village, who had led the church since 1994, after the death of her mother, the former prophetess and church leader, in 1990. In June 2006 she was promoted to the position of District Pastor and replaced by the young (male) pastor of the station in the neighbouring village of Eleni: since then the two stations have been conducting joint meetings. The female pastor, however, remains important in the life of the station. Until 2005, just prior to the start of this research, the church met in a room within her compound, in the centre of the village. As the church grew and because the noise of its activities disturbed the customers of the guest house also run by the pastor, they petitioned the village chief for land and were granted a site on the outskirts of the village, two minutes' walk from the main road, where they are constructing their own church building. As Picture 4.6 shows, the current building is a bamboo structure with a tin roof. Most of the concrete floor is completed and more permanent walls of concrete blocks are added to as and when church finances permit. In practice this has been funded mainly by the pastor herself, who has a small income from her guest house and pharmacy.

Within the church building there are no fixed furnishings (including no electricity) and at the start of each service a table is placed at the front of the room, behind which sits the pastor. Plastic chairs (carried from the female pastor's house and back for every meeting, to avoid theft) and wooden benches are laid out in rows facing the table with an aisle running down the middle and a large empty space left in front of them for dancing. There are no especially 'sacred' areas into which only certain people are allowed; however, seating areas are assigned according to gender, age and office. Since there is an extremely high gender imbalance in the church, both aisles are filled with women while the two or three men who usually attend sit on a bench placed along the side wall to the pastor's right. To his left, against the front wall and

the opposite side wall sit the female elders and choristers. Children sit together on rows of wooden benches in the back left-hand corner of the church.

The MDCC building is not, however, the only—or indeed the most—sacred site in the village for its members. Musama churches—or temples, as they are properly called—have a large white cross erected outside them, marked in red on its four arms with the letters MDCC, and it is around this cross that most of the prayer rituals take place. In Ndwumizili the cross is still in its old location in the courtyard of the female pastor, adjacent to the former church. There are plans to erect a second cross at the new site, but for the time being rituals continue to be carried out at the current one, meetings sometimes starting at one location and moving to the other partway through (about a quarter of a mile distant). The female pastor then, although no longer directly responsible for the station, still remains central to its life, providing storage for chairs and a venue for meetings as well as retaining authority over the current pastor in her new, superior role. She is also respected on a symbolic level, in her association with the origins of the church and with the site of the Musama cross.

**Picture 4.7: MDCC cross with buckets of water placed in preparation for prayers and bathing ritual.**



**Picture 4.8: Ndwumizili MDCC congregation.**



**Picture 4.9: Giving the ‘free’ offering, MDCC.**



The MDCC style of service has similarities with both mission and Pentecostal churches. Like Pentecostal churches there is a strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit and extended periods of singing and dancing. Like many mission churches, MDCC services follow a set liturgy, clergy are robed and use is made of symbolic articles such as candles, bells, incense, crosses, rosaries and oil. The male pastor wears a white robe with a cross around his neck and a cord around his waist. The female pastor is adorned similarly, in a white dress. Elders and choristers also dress entirely in white, and drape a long piece of white lace over their heads in addition to the white headscarf worn by every female member. A bell is rung three times to mark the beginning and end of each Sunday service, which has a liturgical structure including many chants, responses and prayers recited by heart. Set prayers during church services take a call-response form, and the intercessions are directed by the pastor while all members of the congregation simultaneously pray aloud on each theme. There is a great deal of singing and dancing, but also one or two more sober hymns sung from the church's hymn book, led by the pastor who reads each line before the congregation sings it. Services also incorporate a sermon, delivered by the station pastor or a visiting pastor, an 'announcements' section during which administrative (predominantly financial) matters are dealt with, and various monetary collections.

At least seven different kinds of offering can be identified within Ndwumizili MDCC, each with its own purpose and method of collection. First (not chronologically), each member is required to pay 'monthly dues' of ₦2,000<sup>23</sup>, a kind of membership fee which entitles the individual to burial by the church. This goes towards the 'assessment', which is a monthly charge made to all stations for expenses such as administration, the upkeep of church offices and the living expenses of church elders who reside at the national headquarters and whose job is purely to pray. The second fixed-rate offering is towards funeral expenses: ₦3,000 are collected from each member whenever there is a death in the circuit (a group of four stations). These two contributions are meticulously recorded and the treasurer has the job of collecting them from individuals, although they are not always forthcoming as is clear from the repeated admonitions from the pastor regarding lack of payment.

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<sup>23</sup> ₦2,000 = approx. 12p.

Services usually include two main offerings taken during music and dancing, first the tithe (in theory 10% of a person's income), which constitutes the pastor's allowance, and then the 'free' offering which is any additional amount the individual wishes to contribute. For each of these a plastic bowl is placed on a chair in the centre of the open space at the front of the church and each person follows his/her neighbour to dance in a line around and up to the bowl to deliver the offering. Fifth are donations made as part of 'testimonies', where individuals stand in front of the congregation to announce what they would like God to do for them, whether specific, such as healing for a sick child, or more general, such as continued protection for all church members. Less frequently accounts are given of blessings already received. Around a dozen testimonies are given in this way, some members making more than one request. With each testimony a small amount of money is placed into a bowl, while some people openly make the symbolic gesture of offering without actually giving money. The sixth type is the 'special offering', taken irregularly and for specific causes, such as for the building project or travel expenses for the pastor or a visiting pastor. This can take a variety of forms according to the pastor's direction: sometimes a member is sent round the congregation to collect contributions, at other times people are asked to come to the front to place their donations directly into the hand of the pastor or to stand in a circle for him to collect it from each person in turn. Finally, the MDCC holds an annual 'Thanksgiving' service, the aim of which is to raise funds for the church. Envelopes for donations are distributed to members of the community outside the church, and the main offering in the service takes the format referred to as 'harvest', which is also sometimes used for special offerings at other times. The leader asks for specific amounts of money, starting high (for instance "who will give ₦100,000?"<sup>24</sup>) and gradually lowering the sum to ₦1,000 or even ₦500<sup>25</sup>. At each call anyone wishing to contribute that amount proceeds to the front of the church to receive a blessing. Pastors often push quite hard until a satisfactory number of responses is received before reducing the level of contribution, and people are usually expected to wait at the front to be prayed over as a group before returning to their seats. People may give more than once at different levels, and often this type of offering is made into a fairly humorous affair, with the pastor refusing to let each

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<sup>24</sup> ₦100,000 = approx. £5.90.

<sup>25</sup> ₦500 = approx. 3p.



giver sit down until somebody else has offered to pay a 'ransom' of the same amount of money.

Antwe (1980) notes that both traditional Fante culture and Musama religion assign certain times of year as particularly auspicious and sacred, the former around the months of July, August and September, marking the end of one agricultural cycle and the beginning of the next, and the latter the period around 24<sup>th</sup> August, the anniversary of the birth of the Akaboha II. To this can be added the standard events on the Christian calendar, in particular Christmas and Easter, when a series of special meetings are held including a mourning vigil on the night of Maundy Thursday and a mock burial on Good Friday. On a daily cycle, according to Antwe, particular importance is attributed to dawn, midday, sunset, evening and midnight, due to the ease of reckoning these times by the crowing of the cock and the movement of the sun. In Ndwumizili, apart from Sunday morning services, the timing of prayer meetings is not fixed: they take place according to the pastor's direction (and begin when enough people arrive) and are typically held at any time from eight o'clock in the evening onwards. It is not uncommon for members to rise or to be awoken in the middle of the night for prayers, sometimes impromptu and based on a vision or dream of the pastor.

At other times special prayer meetings are planned for the quietest time of night, around three o'clock, for example when several pastors converged on the female pastor's house to pray for a man (a 'drunkard', as described by the pastor) who had placed a curse on his wife—an MDCC member—for stealing money from him and then repented and asked to join the church when he found out she was innocent. Issues such as removing curses and dealing with alcoholism require powerful prayers and the pastor explained that although God listens to prayers at all times, "when it is quiet, when every head is down, prayers then are really answered". Dawn is also a common time for MDCC prayers and songs, which reflects not so much traditional religion as Methodist traditions of dawn singing. The daily life of each member should revolve around various set prayers to be recited at everyday events, such as before and after meals and before washing, and on other occasions such as receiving visitors and entering a vehicle to start a journey. Additional devotional prayers may also be said, such as the Yinaabi prayer, to be recited three times a day, and the Maundy Thursday Vigil, performed each week (formerly requiring a weekly

pilgrimage to Mozano). Group devotions should also be carried out each morning, but in practice this does not take place every day. Occasionally the church meets each evening for two or three weeks for loud, vocal prayer, including singing and chanting.

## ***Assemblies of God Church***

**Picture 4.10: AG church building.**



The Assemblies of God church was brought to Ghana in 1931 by American missionaries, who reached Ndwumizili in 1957. However, after they left several years later the church collapsed and it was not until 2001 that the present pastor, who is of Ahanta ethnicity, arrived to start it afresh. He lives in Ndwumizili but divides his time between this church and another in a nearby village for which he is also responsible. In his absence services are led by three deacons: two men and one woman. The congregation numbers about 20 plus a dozen small children, with approximately twice as many women as men, few young people and several educated to senior secondary level or higher. Within the global Assemblies of God church each country is autonomous and there is no centralised pay system. The pastor is dependent on the congregation for his income, but in reality receives such a small amount (around 200,000 cedis per month, about £12) that he and his wife and child rely on the wife's teacher's salary and accommodation.

The AG possesses a plot of land near the centre of the village, by the side of the paved road and closely surrounded by houses. The church has been situated there ever since it was founded by the white missionaries, although after their departure and before the arrival of the present pastor in 2001 it fell into dereliction and part of the land was sold off. The church is in the process of constructing a new, concrete building, which currently has the floor, most of the walls and a corrugated iron roof, but no windows, doors or plaster. The basic layout is similar to the MDCC: there are no fixed furnishings and at the start of each service a table is placed at the front of the room, behind which sits the pastor. Being a Pentecostal church, beyond a Bible, notebooks, a clock and sometimes an ornamental plastic flower arrangement no props, utensils or religious symbols are used. When the time comes for the sermon, a wooden lectern is moved from the corner to the centre of the church. Men and women sit on wooden benches and plastic chairs (also carried from storage each week) facing the table, on either side of a centre aisle. People with status in the church, such as the pastor's wife and the deacon(esse)s, are likely to sit on the front rows, although neither this nor the gender segregation are always followed, and the pastor usually joins the congregation when the Sunday school is led or the sermon is preached by somebody else. As in all churches people dress smartly when attending; however a few women—generally the younger or more educated—sometimes omit the customary headscarf. Unlike the MDCC no special colour is required and the pastor wears a suit rather than robes. Other than the church building, the AG does not consider any locations in the village as particularly sacred: people pray at home or visit the pastor's house to request prayer. Even the building itself is not regarded as intrinsically holy, although its construction and maintenance are considered extremely important as a sign of respect to God, a witness to the village—of the glory of God and of the success of the church—and simply as a practical venue for church activities. There is no holy city or temple: the national headquarters consists of modern offices in Accra and the Easter regional convention was held on the premises of a school.

**Picture 4.11: Ndwumizili AG service (Sunday school).**



After an opening song and prayers of thanks for the past week and committing the service into God's hands, Sunday worship starts with a Bible class (or 'Sunday School'). This is usually led by the pastor or one of the deacons, who follows material published quarterly by the national AG head office. These sessions last approximately one hour and are based around a series of questions usually focussed on a single Bible passage. All members of the congregation are expected to contribute to the discussion, which is often lively and sometimes becomes heated. Services then continue to follow a similar pattern to most other Pentecostal churches. Praise and worship songs are led by one or two women and usually begin with energetic music accompanied by clapping and dancing, gradually sobering into slower tunes which may invoke raised hands, kneeling or prostration, and tears. Prayers are directed in theme by a leader and uttered aloud, simultaneously and fervently by the congregation. The sermon is usually given by the pastor, but may also be delivered by one of the senior members of the congregation, including the educated women. Like the MDCC, the AG church holds a Thanksgiving service every year (in conjunction with its sister church in a neighbouring village) in a similar format although, reflecting the slightly higher levels of income of some of the members as compared to the MDCC, greater sums are called for. The main weekly offering, which covers the running of the church and the pastor's upkeep, is also conducted in a similar manner to that of the MDCC, church members dancing to

place their contributions in a bowl at the front of the church. There is also a ‘Sunday school offering’, taken in the same way at the end of the Bible class preceding the main service; however, during the period of study this was phased out in favour of a similar additional offering after the main one in order to raise money for the building project or any other need that may arise. Testimonies of blessings received during the week are sometimes called for, and each is normally accompanied by a symbolic offering of gratitude from the individual concerned. AG tithes are presented in envelopes with little ceremony weekly or monthly, and sent on to the regional headquarters to contribute to administrative costs. The AG leaves the execution of funerals to the family of the deceased, only conducting memorial/thanksgiving services, although often when a church member dies or is bereaved the local church makes a financial contribution as a gesture of support. There are no fixed membership fees, but individual members and the branch as a whole are often asked to contribute to expenses such as the administration of the regional Easter convention (¢20,000 per member in 2006) and the AG Bible School (¢80,000 in total from the congregation).<sup>26</sup>

Apart from Sunday mornings, the church meets on Tuesday evenings for Bible study, on Thursdays and Fridays for prayer, and there is a Women’s Ministry on Sunday evenings. Additional meetings are occasionally planned for other evenings and all-night or half-night prayer vigils are sometimes arranged, often in connection with the AG church of a neighbouring village. However, these meetings are not always well attended. Although according to AG doctrine effective prayer can take place at any time, as in the MDCC, night is considered an especially powerful time to pray. In a sermon based on Lamentations 2:19<sup>27</sup>, delivered by the deaconess and directed mainly at female members of the congregation (it was international women’s day), she urges them to cry out in prayer for their children and for their problems: “the Lord is calling us to wake up at midnight and pray and pour out all our needs onto him, for he is ready to answer our prayers” (Anna, 09/07/06). The prayer she encourages, however, is individual and spontaneous, in contrast with the communal and liturgical prayers of the MDCC.

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<sup>26</sup> ¢20,000 = approx. £1.20.

<sup>27</sup> Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street.

**Picture 4.12: Ndwumizili AG children's Sunday school.**



**Picture 4.13: Ndwumizili AG prayers.**



## Conclusion

The context of this study, then, is a small rural village, of which the native, slightly marginalised Ahanta population is interspersed with members of larger ethnic groups. Ndwumizili is remarkable—although not by any means unique along the coast of Ghana—as containing high levels of poverty alongside luxurious tourist accommodation: residents have frequent contact with expatriates and elite Ghanaians and unattainable wealth is on daily display. The majority of the population describe themselves as Christian, although church membership and attendance rates are relatively low. The number and diversity of churches are increasing, with Pentecostal denominations fragmenting and multiplying especially rapidly, although the AICs and mission churches remain important and generally larger. The churches on which this study is based consist of an indigenous church and a Pentecostal church. The history of the former stretches back forty years in Ndwumizili, while the latter has very recently been revived from dormancy, reflecting observations in literature on historical trends in Ghanaian Christianity which point to AICs peaking in the 1960s and 70s while Pentecostalism has increased rapidly over the past two decades (see Chapter 2 pp.30-31). Both churches have ordained pastors resident in the village and both are in the process of constructing church buildings. The congregations are drawn from broadly different sectors of the population: MDCC members tend to be very poor, uneducated and overwhelmingly female, while the AG church, as well as containing a higher proportion of men (although still not equal to women) and higher overall levels of education, has among its membership several people with relatively stable jobs. This is also in line with wider literature and may reflect the nature of practice in the two churches, the MDCC centred on ritual and symbolism while the AG holds Bible study and understanding as important.

Despite differences in doctrine and practice, members of these churches should not be perceived as living within separate socio-religious discourses. In the next chapter I examine the cosmology of the residents of Ndwumizili, drawing out elements which are shared throughout the population as well as those which are influenced and shaped by the two churches.

## A World of Powers: Cosmologies

### Introduction

In Chapter 2 (pp.46-47) a debate was referred to concerning the place of religion in African society. Some authors argue that it is essential to understanding any aspect of African social life, since all Africans are fundamentally religious (or ‘spiritual’) and view the world through religious discourses (Mbiti 1989, Ellis & Ter Haar 2004). Others argue that religion should be kept in its place: that it is not the overarching framework through which all Africans understand all of life, but rather that some things are religious and some are not: it is a social and analytical category amongst others (Green 2006). This category needs to be questioned, since, as Brenner observes,

most studies of African societies treat ‘religion’ as an institutionally and conceptually distinct category of analysis *as if* the author knew precisely what it was, not only for himself, but for the members of the societies under study as well. The result has been that, consciously or not, external concepts have come to define ‘religion’ in Africa. (Brenner 1989: 87)

The aim of this chapter is to enter, as far as possible, the world inhabited by the residents of Ndwumizili and to build a picture of what that world is like in terms of their religious imaginary. I start by discussing approaches to exploring cosmologies, drawing on literature from medical anthropology referred to in Chapter 2 (pp.49-51) and arguing that there is no single discourse (or set of single discourses) that frames people’s understandings of the world. I go on to suggest an alternative way of understanding the worldview of the inhabitants of Ndwumizili: rather than acting within or ‘believing in’ identifiable cosmological systems, they live in a world of different powers and interact with these to varying extents as they manage their lives. After outlining the key powers I turn the focus to the AG and MDC churches, discussing how each of them conceptualises the world, particularly in relation to these powers.



## Exploring Cosmologies

One way of discussing the worldview of the people of Ndwumizili would be to attempt a systematic overview of ‘Ahanta cosmology’, setting out its beliefs, symbols and practices as a coherent and discrete religious system, and then to consider how this has been influenced by foreign (especially Western) thought systems—both secular and religious—and in particular how it has been interpreted and adapted by the churches on which this study focuses. There are two broad reasons why this approach is not the one I take. Firstly, the village of Ndwumizili is not ethnically homogeneous: people of Fante, Nzema and other ethnic groups live alongside and have intermarried with the Ahanta population. Thus, if it were ever at all possible to talk about a distinct Ahanta cosmology, this would not be relevant for the many people in this study who are of different ethnic origin or, indeed, the Ahanta people whose view of the world has inevitably been influenced by contact with neighbouring groups. As described in Chapter 4 (p.102), the Ahanta people are closely related to the Nzemas and the wider family of Akan language groups. There is some debate over whether the Ahantas are actually a sub-division of the Akans (as are the Fantes, Asantes and others). Although they were designated as such in the 2000 census (Ghana Statistical Service 2002), linguistically they are classified separately (Gordon 2005), and most Ahantas I spoke to insisted on their distinctiveness as a separate ethnicity. For the purposes of this study the debate is irrelevant. Instead of describing a theoretical belief system associated with a particular ethnic group which itself exists more as an abstract label than as a reflection of reality, I will be drawing out practices, assumptions and views of the world shared more widely by people of different ethnic origins.

Secondly, in exploring the cosmology of the residents of Ndwumizili I do not start with the assumption that individuals hold in their heads a single, coherent or comprehensive cosmological system which they use to interpret the world. As we have seen in Chapter 2 (pp.49-50), it has been widely argued in the field of medical anthropology that patients from many different societies and cultures are essentially pragmatic in their approach to healthcare. Different forms of treatment and therapy are combined without contradiction because people engage with them on a practical rather than an intellectual basis: the employment of a certain method of treatment does not necessitate acceptance or understanding of the ideology behind it (Brodwin

1996; Last 1992; Lock & Nichter 2002). This insight also applies to other forms of action, including religious practice in Ghana (Appiah 1992). People's worldviews are constructed from their experiences as well as from what they have been taught. Since the world they experience is in a continuous state of change, rather than adhering to one particular and fixed cosmological discourse, Ghanaians constantly accommodate or move between different discourses. Indeed, most people in Ndwumizili do not view the world in terms of discourses or belief systems at all. There is little sense of choosing to believe in one system of beliefs over another, or of choosing to 'believe' or 'disbelieve' in the existence of certain spiritual beings. As Brenner (1989) observes, the identification of religion with 'belief' persists in relation to Africa despite several scholars having pointed out that this is a mainly Western association<sup>28</sup> and that in Africa notions of belief may be very different if, indeed, they exist at all (Horton 1967, 1982; Needham 1972). Brenner argues:

an analysis of 'religion' among Yoruba speakers which is based upon non-critical concepts of 'belief' is bound to be somewhat misleading, although this kind of analysis is very common and is manifested in what might be called the 'What-the-Yoruba-Believe' syndrome in the study of African 'religion'. This approach is most often characterised by the production of cosmologies which purport to demonstrate what one or another social grouping 'believes'. ...[M]any such cosmologies severely misrepresent how 'religious' concepts and practices develop and actually function in reality. Nonetheless, cosmologies remain central to most academic discourse about African 'religion', presumably because they neatly fit into Western concepts of what constitutes 'religion'. (Brenner 1989: 88)

In his intellectualist analyses of African religion, Horton (1967) compares it with Western scientific discourse, arguing that both are primarily concerned with explanation, prediction and control of everyday events. He posits spirits and deities "as theoretical propositions analogous to atoms and neutrons" (Brenner 1989: 88) rather than 'religious' figures to be actively believed in. While an intellectualist approach almost by definition advocates the existence (and awareness) of a comprehensive and coherent cosmology—whether 'religious' or otherwise—this parallel in itself does not: most people in Western societies who accept without question the existence of atoms and neutrons do so without the need for a complete understanding of how they work.

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<sup>28</sup> Although, of course, belief as an intrinsic part of religion is not exclusive to Western society.

If belief is not the fundamental issue, then the central question is not whether spiritual beings exist, but what they are like, how much power they have, and how far one can and should interact with them: the same questions that may be posed regarding other powers such as family, governing authorities and doctors. This is crucial because it determines the framework within which people act and relate, informing their options in terms of both how situations and events can be interpreted, and what can be done to address them. There is a continual tension between the extent to which one can engage with and influence the powers, and the extent to which one is subject to their will, and this varies both between the different powers and through time. Perceptions of powers are not static but continually modified according to changing social, cultural, economic and environmental conditions and the different socio-religious discourses which they bring—which are themselves subject to continuous change. In the rest of this chapter I outline the major powers which are perceived to have potential impact on people's lives. I also discuss the discourses emanating from the MDC and AG churches in relation to these powers and more widely.

## **The Powers**

In Chapter 2 (pp.45-46) it was noted that in African society there is a fundamental continuity between the 'physical' and the 'spiritual'. Whereas the general trend in the Western intellectual world, stemming from Enlightenment times, has been to separate out religion and the spiritual from public life, politics and the physical, this has not been the case in Africa. Despite the efforts of colonial and post-independence governments to achieve European-style, secular bureaucracies, religion has remained a central part of public life. It has done so both in terms of institutional religion, with Christianity and Islam in particular wielding considerable political power, and in the wider sense of a general perception of a close relationship between power and the spiritual. However, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, the Enlightenment paradigm remains dominant in intellectual analyses across the world, to the extent that it underpins the very language we use: terms such as 'physical' or 'material' and 'spiritual' or 'immaterial' already imply distinction. Wiredu argues:

The absolute ontological cleavage between the material and immaterial will not exist in Akan metaphysics. ...[T]hat Africans are constantly said to believe in spiritual entities in the immaterial sense can be put down to the conceptual impositions in the colonizing accounts of African thought in colonial times and their post-colonial aftermath. (Wiredu 2003: 24)

In the paragraphs that follow I take on the role of translator described in Chapter 3 (pp.94-95), using by necessity the language of social science to portray to a social science audience an understanding of the world that does not fit easily into social science categories. None of the powers presented here is fixed uniquely in either a spiritual world or a physical world: they populate a continuous landscape, transcending this artificial division by existing and operating in both dimensions.

## **Nyame**

Larbi (2001b) describes the Akan understanding of the spirit world in terms of Parrinder's fourfold classification: "the Supreme God, divinities or gods, ancestors, and charms and amulets" (p.2). God, most commonly referred to as *Nyame* or *Onyame* in Fante and *Nyamunli* in Ahanta, is often described in anthropological studies of the Akan (e.g. Bartle 1983; Grottanelli 1988) as remote, having withdrawn after creating the world to leave its governance to minor deities. Fisher, however, challenges this analysis, pointing to other Akan names for God such as *Nyaamankose*, "the Confidant, a trusting counselor in times of trouble" and *Tweduapon*, "the One who listens to our problems, decides wisely and whose decision gives us comfort" to indicate *Nyame*'s active concern with and involvement in the lives of those in the physical world (Fisher 1998: 139). The same term is also used for God within Ghanaian Christianity, and since Christianity has become so embedded into Ghanaian society it is hard—perhaps impossible—to distinguish between 'Akan' and 'Christian' concepts of God. When somebody talks about 'God' in Ghana it makes no sense to ask them whether they are referring to the Christian God or the Akan traditional God: they are one and the same, *Nyame* is simply *Nyame*.<sup>29</sup> What is clear is that *Nyame* is supreme above all other spiritual beings and

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<sup>29</sup> Wiredu (2003), calling for "decolonization of African religions", argues vehemently that the Christian God and the Akan God are not at all one and the same. However, he comes from a philosophical perspective with the agenda of "disentangling African frameworks of thought from

above all the rest of creation. It is he (*Nyame* is considered male; his spouse, *Asase Yaa*, is the earth goddess and inferior to him) who is constantly referred to in the names of businesses and in slogans painted on vehicles (*Nyaminli wɔ ɛkɛ*—‘God is there’—is the title of a shop at the Ndwumizili taxi station). He is omnipresent (an Akan proverb says, ‘If you have something to say to God, tell it to the wind’) and omniscient, as represented by the most commonly used *adinkra* symbol<sup>30</sup>, seen on clothes, walls, furniture, signs and stickers and entitled *Gye Nyame*, which means ‘Except God’ (without God there is nothing).



**Picture 5.1 (above): *Gye Nyame*.**

**Picture 5.2 (below): *Gye Nyame* incorporated into the design of a chair.**




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colonial impositions” (p.34), rather than seeking to understand how differing and hybrid frameworks are managed in people’s lives.

<sup>30</sup> There are several hundred *adinkra* symbols, each with its own name and meaning, referring to proverbs, aphorisms, human attributes, historical events and natural objects and species. Although they are widely used throughout Ghanaian society and found on diverse goods and products, their primary function is as dye-stamps for hand-printed *adinkra* cloth, produced by Asante craftsmen. The origins of *adinkra* are said to lie with a king of the same name from Côte d’Ivoire who was captured and brought to the Asante court in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Abosom**

Far beneath *Nyame* in the cosmological scheme of things are a range of minor deities, commonly referred to as ‘small gods’ (*abosom* (pl.); *obosom* (sg.) in Fante). These vary in importance and characteristics: some are related to specific ethnic groups, clans, lineages or smaller social divisions, some have been imported from other groups due to their perceived power, still others are associated with particular locations, such as the island and lagoons in Ndwumizili. Although usually invisible they can appear in human form if they so wish: it is common knowledge in Ndwumizili that the deities of the lagoons in the village both look like white people, one male and the other female, and many people claim to have seen the male walking along the beach near his home. Grottanelli describes deities as “the supreme guardians of social order and morals” (1988: 19), sometimes considered tutelary in nature but more often punishing those guilty of dishonesty, uncleanness and impurity “either of their own divine initiative or at the request of people who have been harmed” (*ibid.*: 19). They are therefore traditionally considered neutral rather than malicious, and moral reason is usually attributed to any harm they cause. Thus, the death of two young children during their mother’s long-term absence at school in a different town was explained to her in a dream by the male deity of one of the Ndwumizili lagoons: “I gave them to you and you didn’t look after them so I took them back.” In addition to such moral norms, deities have their own taboos which must not be violated, for example allowing the ocean to rest (i.e. not fishing) on Tuesdays and farmland to rest on Wednesdays. Anyone transgressing these rules does so on pain of punishment, sometimes death. Within these parameters, however, they are unlikely to cause harm: it is perfectly safe, for example, to visit the tiny island off Ndwumizili inhabited by the deity after whom it is named.

Like *Nyame*, the minor deities are not things to be ‘believed in’ as part of a particular religion; they simply exist. Wiredu insists that ‘gods’ is a misnomer as *abosom* are not comparable with God and are simply super-human beings. He argues:

As far at least as the Akans are concerned, it can be said that their attitude to those extra-human beings generally called minor gods in the literature is not really religious. On the contrary, it is utilitarian, for the most part. The powers in question are ... a regular part of the resources of the world. If human beings understand how they function and are able to establish satisfactory relations with them, they can exploit their powers to their advantage. One has, of

course, to be circumspect because falling foul of them could be dangerous. (Wiredu 2003: 25)

Unlike *Nyame* however, *abosom* are not omniscient, and once their power—either to punish or to grant supplicants’ requests—is perceived to wane, they are likely to be abandoned or disregarded. Fisher remarks that “[s]ome deities simply die out from lack of business” (1998: 122), while Larbi explains:

The continued featuring of a particular god (*obosom*) in the religious pantheon of the Akan largely depends upon the ability of that *obosom* to function to the satisfaction of supplicants. The Akan esteem the Supreme Being and the ancestors far above the *abosom* (gods) and amulets. Attitudes to the latter depend upon their success, and vary from healthy respect to sneering contempt and rejection. (Larbi 2001b: 2)

People are thus not entirely dependent on and subject to the deities, but able to interact with and manipulate the spirits for their own ends. The ways in which power is transferred to the physical world, the means through which it is used and the purposes to which it is put vary enormously.

### ***Experts and juju***

While access to God is available to everyone, some people are regarded as being closer to the spirits than others (Bastian 1993: 133). ‘Fetish priests/priestesses’<sup>31</sup> guard shrines to deities and act as intermediaries between the gods and their human petitioners; a chief is considered “the living shrine of his own matrilineal ancestors” (Bartle 1983: 95) or, as described by one of my informants, “our link with the sacred” (Paul, 24, Methodist member). Those in search of solutions to difficulties also have other options available to them, notably those called *nsinli* in Ahanta and *nyesie* in Fante, whose profession involves the manipulation of herbs and plants as well as the charms and amulets mentioned by Parrinder, in order to exploit spiritual power. These practices are often referred to as *juju*. Although *juju* can be used for good (for example healing and divination) and its power is sought by many people, in everyday speech as well as films and newspaper reports it appears to be mainly associated with evil, sinister and often individualistic practices, probably largely due

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<sup>31</sup> In Ghanaian English deities are usually referred to as ‘small gods’ or ‘fetishes’.

to the increasing influence of Christianity. However, although usually conceived of as spiritual activity outside the realm of established Christian (and Islamic) communities, there is ambiguity in this area: other practitioners regarded as possessing spiritual power to remedy problems and sometimes associated with juju include Muslim *mallams* and Christian pastors.

Wealth in Africa can be reckoned in spiritual as well as material terms (Bastian 1993; Ellis & Ter Haar 2004), with age, knowledge, title, office, health and prosperity all acting as indicators of spiritual wealth. The actors mentioned above (fetish priests/priestesses, chiefs, juju practitioners, *mallams*, pastors) are all considered spiritually wealthy and their responsibility is to redistribute this wealth for the good of the community, although they do not always do so. There are also perceived to exist people who possess large amounts of spiritual wealth which they use exclusively to the detriment of society. These people are labelled as witches.

## ***Witches***

Witches can be of either sex (males are often called sorcerers or wizards), although they are usually thought of as female. Although they can acquire mastery of their power, unlike juju the power itself does not consist in a skill but is intrinsic to their person: people say “he knows juju”, but “she is a witch”. It can be acquired in various ways, usually through the mediation of someone who is already a witch: one can inherit it at birth, ask for it, or accept the transferral of power from a witch at their death. Witchcraft is greatly feared, and those accused of it risk being cast out of their home and community, and sometimes lynched. Cleansing from witchcraft is possible, but because of its intrinsic nature it requires exorcism which is usually extremely traumatic (see Ter Haar 2007). Activities of witches often take place at night, when they leave their physical bodies and fly around to meet other witches, indulge in grotesque sexual orgies and attack their victims. They can also assume the form of living creatures, including other human beings. The common idiom through which witches are viewed is as ‘feeding’ (“chop” in Ghanaian slang) on their victims, whether physically, financially or in other ways; they are therefore considered to dispossess others of spiritual wealth, accumulating it for themselves and destroying instead of participating in society (see Chapter 2 pp.53-55). Any kind of misfortune may be suspected of being caused by witchcraft, especially if it is



serious, recurrent or ongoing; indeed, it is commonly asserted that the first and central question asked by Ghanaians in the face of disaster is not ‘why?’, but ‘who?’<sup>32</sup>.

Witchcraft is always regarded as evil (although Bastian (1993: 144) suggests that in Igbo society some people may be turning to ‘good’ witchcraft in order to protect themselves and their families and communities from attacks by other witches) and is carried out in secret, the identity of (alleged) witches only revealed through accusations and confessions. The issue is therefore shrouded in rumour and uncertainty: although (or because) it is difficult to accuse anyone outright with any certitude, it is also difficult to prove one’s innocence and suspicion is constantly lurking under the surface. Witches are usually thought to attack members of their own family, since these are the people they have intimate knowledge of and access to. An Akan proverb states, “It is the animal in your cloth that bites you” (Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998: 4). Family members are therefore prime suspects in cases of possible witchcraft and it is not uncommon for accusations to be made. The pervasiveness of suspicions and accusations of witchcraft is clearly demonstrated in a Junior Secondary School textbook: students are taught in their Religious and Moral Education classes, “One must not accuse family member of witchcraft when things go wrong in life [sic]” (Konadu 2003: 14).

## **Chiefs**

The figure of the chief was described by one of my informants as “our link with the sacred” (Paul, 24, Methodist member). Chiefs are the traditional heads of communities and are still recognised alongside elected assembly men and women, although their role is becoming increasingly contested. This is due partly to problems of maintaining a dual system of authority and calls from modernists for the abolishment of what they see as an outdated institution, and partly to the frequent episodes of violence associated with chieftaincy disputes—which indicates that chieftaincies still hold an amount of power significant enough to fight over. Indeed, as noted in Chapter 4 (p.105), the chief is referred to in everyday conversation far more often than the elected assembly member. While the latter is the link with the state and represents in the democratic political arena the village that has elected him

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<sup>32</sup> Although malicious acts are of course not necessarily committed through witchcraft.

or her, the chief has authority over that village, distributing land, ruling in disputes and presiding over ceremonies. Because the chieftaincy in Akan (and Ahanta) society is hereditary (on a matrilineal basis), unlike assemblymen who come and go every few years, the chief may remain in position for decades and his power is inherent to his person rather than conferred upon him externally and temporarily. As Bartle asserts, “from the time of enstoolment [installation as chief] ... the chief’s body is itself sacred, being continuously possessed by the collective spirit of all matrilineal ancestors” (1983: 109). A chief’s power, however, is not absolute. Although the position is hereditary it is not automatically designated to a particular person; rather, the next chief is selected from a pool of men eligible according to their status within the clan, or lineage (*abusua*). There are seven lineages between which the chieftaincy alternates and the chief rules as part of a council of elders made up of the heads of each lineage (of which he is not one). A chief can be deposed (‘destooled’), and violent disputes may arise if certain groups perceive him to be acting inappropriately. Like the *abosom*, then, the power of and reverence for the chief is dependent to a certain extent on his ability to deliver results. Unlike the *abosom*, people cannot simply cease to interact with him and allow him to “die out from lack of business” (Fisher 1998: 122): he must be removed and replaced.

## **Ancestors**

Ellis and Ter Haar assert that in Africa all power is perceived to originate ultimately in the spirit world (2004: 4). This is not to say that in their everyday lives people always think of the power relationships they encounter in spiritual terms, nor that human beings are absolved of all responsibility for their actions. The relationship between the physical and the spiritual is dynamic and although the origins of power are thought to lie with the spirits, it is manifested, as far as humans are concerned, in the physical world. *Abosom* have their homes in earthly places such as lagoons, trees, boulders and rivers, and their actions take place in the physical world. Ancestors, respected members of the community who have died, are not disconnected from society. Grottanelli writes of the Nzema people:

The main concern of [the ancestors] is that farms should go on being tilled in order to provide food for the living, that compounds built in the past should be kept in a good state of repair, that women should bring forth children so that lineages and towns

multiply and prosper, and that social order and morals be respected.  
(Grottanelli 1988: 16)

The centrality of the physical world is repeatedly underlined by anthropologists and theologians. By interpreting 'life after death' as "the life of those who remain behind after the death of an older relative" (Van der Geest 2002: 15), participants in Van der Geest's study of the views of older Akan people about death do not simply privilege the concerns of this world over those of the next, but rather imply that the concerns of the dead *are* those of this world. Fisher points out that Akan prayers accompanying the pouring of libation include requests for health, long life, children and material prosperity: "[n]o one ever prays for future happiness in a life after death" (1998: 100). Likewise, Larbi posits that in what he terms "primal Akan religion", "the followers are reaching out to a form of salvation that relates to the *existential here and now*" and have no concept of heaven after death (2001b: 9).

The ancestors, then, are still considered and expected to play an ongoing role in the community. Libation, the pouring of alcohol onto the ground accompanied by words directed at the ancestors, is a ceremony recognising their presence and continued participation in communal gatherings. Moreover, they have power to intervene in the lives of the living and demand respect for themselves. Hence, when an important elder of Ndwumizili died in March 2005 and his funeral was planned for six months later in order to avoid the rainy season and to allow adequate time for elaborate arrangements to be made and distant relatives to arrive, some members of the family began to feel uncomfortable about the delay. In June urgent meetings were called after a son of the dead man was hospitalised with typhoid for three days following a dream in which he was addressed by his father, who asked what was wrong with him that they had left him 'in the fridge' (mortuary) for so long.

## ***Family***

Ancestors are a continuation of the family: on a basic level they are simply family members who happen to be dead, and they are respected as elders. The institution of the family is of prime importance in Akan and Ahanta societies, the central and fundamental unit through which one's status and position in the community is formed. However, the word 'family' as used by Ghanaians refers to a very different concept from the sense of the term in Western society. It is normally used as a

translation for the term *abusua* which refers to the lineage of one's mother, "an exogamous corporate group of a few hundred people, all of whom are recruited by birth through female lines of descent—not by marriage" (Bartle 1983: 87). As this is a matrilineal society children are counted as part of their mother's *abusua* and not their father's, and boys (normally) thus traditionally inherit from their maternal uncles. Relations within the *abusua* are prioritised over those based on affinity, and the *abusua* retains a high level of power in the lives of its members, including married women. The strength of the *abusua* is underlined by the transient nature of the household, the constitution of which is likely to change frequently as family members and non-family members arrive for short or extended visits and as work takes men away for varying periods of time. It is very common for children to be brought up by aunts and uncles in households and villages other than those of their parents and, particularly for the young, the flexibility of unemployment, informal trading and few possessions facilitates mobility. In answer to the question 'where are you from?' the mother's home town is usually given, regardless of whether or not the individual was born or has ever even set foot there. The significance of family bonds is underlined by Peggy Appiah:

It is one of the tenets of Akan society that no one may reveal the secrets of a family to outsiders. With its first sip of water a baby is warned not to talk about family affairs in front of strangers. (Appiah 1979: 65)

The strength of family relationships is thus constructed in a framework of opposition to and protection from others, membership being verified through knowledge of common relatives. An individual owes her or his foremost allegiance to the *abusua*, privileging these relationships over any from 'outside'. Thus, a lady berating her teenage granddaughter for behaving badly and being sent back to the village by a German couple who had offered to educate her in Accra exclaims,

I could have sent Teresa [another girl who lives with her but is from a different family], but you are my granddaughter. If I had sent Teresa people would have said "she is a wicked woman, she didn't help her own grandchild but instead a girl from outside".

Wiredu argues that the basis of morality in Akan society is the "reciprocal adjustment of the interests of the individual to the interests of the community"

(Wiredu, in Ellis & Ter Haar 2004: 142). This is true for all communal relationships, but it is within the family that the most binding ties and the strongest sense of collectivity and solidarity are found. Rites of passage such as baby ‘outdoorings’ take place within the family; marriage is an agreement between two families; it is the family that traditionally has the right to bury their dead and receive the inheritance.<sup>33</sup> Funerals in particular are big family occasions with (depending on the status of the deceased) members of the *abusua* travelling from far and wide to attend. The honour and prestige of the *abusua* supersedes that of the individual, and family members are expected to pool—or at least to make available if required—their resources for the benefit of the family as a whole and other, less fortunate members within it.<sup>34</sup>

With increased contact with and influence of other societies, the extended family system has become a contested institution, considered a valuable part of Ghanaian (and African) culture while also in conflict with modernity. A Senior Secondary School social studies textbook briefly explains the difference between nuclear and extended families, stating that “African societies mostly practise the extended family system while the nuclear family system is practised by Europeans” (Prah 2004: 20). The author lists the advantages and disadvantages of the extended family system as follows:

#### Advantages/Merits/Strengths of the Extended Family

1. Economic and social co-operation
2. Provision of security to family members
3. Socialization of the young ones
4. Resolution of conflicts
5. Conferment of prestige, wealth and power

#### Disadvantages/Demerits/Weaknesses of the Extended Family

1. Retards individual progress
2. Stifling of initiative
3. Interference in individual member’s life

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<sup>33</sup> Conflict sometimes occurs over rights to funeral arrangements, most often between the *abusua* and the children of the deceased or his/her church, some of which carry out funerals. In 1985 the Intestate Succession Law was passed to ensure that the wife and children of a dead man are not completely excluded from his estate: the family now receives only one third of assets acquired by the deceased in his own right, i.e. excluding those deemed family property.

<sup>34</sup> See De Witte 2001, 2003 for analysis of the importance of funerals for family prestige.

#### 4. Land fragmentation.

(Prah 2004: 22-24)

The book goes on to list five areas in which “[m]odernity has impacted negatively on the extended family system, causing it to break down”:

1. Preference for nuclear family (as a result of Western education)
2. The impact of religion and urbanization (resulting in family disputes being referred to church leaders and modern courts of law instead of the family head)
3. Reduction in economic support (due to harsh economic times making family members more individualistic)
4. Impact on traditional system of inheritance (the introduction of wills and laws aimed at protecting the interests of widows and children)
5. The demand of work and urban lifestyle (making it impossible for urban residents to attend to or participate fully in family affairs “back at home” in the village).

(Prah 2004: 24)

This textbook is consciously mediating between tradition and modernity. The extended family system is objectified and set up as an issue for analysis (unlike the nuclear system, the pros and cons of which are not discussed<sup>35</sup>). It is not denigrated in itself, but even where its values are highlighted it is still assessed fundamentally in opposition to modernity and consequently identified with the traditional and the past. In so doing, the categories of ‘Africa’ and ‘Europe’ are reified as diametrically opposed, associated respectively with tradition and modernity.

What is clear from the analysis in this textbook is that family relationships are ambivalent. On the one hand they are a person’s main source of security and support: as an Akan proverb says, ‘when you are at home, your troubles can never defeat you’. On the other hand, they are a burden both in terms of demanding resources and of controlling one’s life. The same book states:

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<sup>35</sup> This may not be the case in all textbooks, several of which by different authors exist at Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary levels.

There is the tendency on the part of the extended family to meddle in the private lives of some relatives. The interference may affect the work, education and marriage of the relatives. The interference in the marriage of a relative may lead to marital problems or even total marital breakdown. (Prah 2004: 23)

Hence, when asking about gender roles within the household I was told by women that if one's husband was seen cooking, cleaning or washing, the wife could expect to be severely reproached by his family for not fulfilling her marital duties. While the textbook interprets this as 'interference', these women perceived such expectations as normal (although not necessarily appreciated), which suggests that the modernist perspective prioritised by Prah is not indicative of attitudes in everyday life.

Moreover, as we have seen in the discussion of witchcraft above, family members are also viewed as potential sources of deliberate harm. This is strongly related to fears of jealousy over individual advancement. The notion that there are witches in your family who are likely to resent your prosperity and use spiritual means to harm you is widespread in Ghanaian society. In the words of a freelance consultant on Christian affairs speaking on an Accra-based radio station, "in Ghana you have to be scared when you are rich—there are people who buy good cars but don't drive them to their home towns, believing that witches will see they are prospering, will rise against you ... if you study Ghanaians very well, we hide our riches." (Joy FM, broadcast on BBC World Service 13/04/07). Poor people are thus feared for their potential jealousy, while the rich are feared for their power. The link between wealth and power is two-fold and dynamic. Firstly, money produces power. It enables people to buy things, to improve their living conditions, to educate their children well, to travel; but it also empowers people in relation to others, not only those who are poorer than themselves, but also those in positions of authority or potential beneficiaries or gatekeepers, as 'dashing' (gift-giving or, in some cases, bribing) is an integral part of building relationships and obtaining favours (see, for example, Olivier de Sardan 1999). Secondly, power is related to wealth in that it is through power that wealth is achieved. The nature of this power varies: material and financial success may imply hard work, skill or intelligence, or it may indicate affluent and influential social or family connections. However, it may also point to power based in the spiritual realm: wealth is often seen as a blessing from God or as a result of juju or witchcraft (Gifford 2004a; Meyer 1995). Whichever the case—and they are

not mutually exclusive—onlookers are aware of the existence of power behind a person's wealth and give it due respect.

Harm, of course, does not only occur through witchcraft and is not only inflicted by members of one's family. Nobody can fully be trusted: as one informant describes it, "Not all eyes in Ghana are good eyes... Someone can sit with you, talk to you, eat with you, but hate you, and you don't know" (Justin, 42, MDCC member). It is generally assumed that one has enemies, although they often remain unidentified: there is a constant underlying consciousness of potential enmity. As we have seen in Chapter 2 (p.55), Adams argues that this outlook is related to a particular model of relationship that he calls 'interdependent selfways' (as opposed to 'independent selfways' common in North America), which promotes objective self-awareness, a sense of openness to interpersonal influence and an experience of relationship as an inevitable fact of social life rather than created through effort or by discretion (Adams 2005: 951). The family forms the context of the strongest interdependent relationships and is thus the most fertile ground for suspicions of enemyship, but the sense of interdependence goes beyond family members: one is by nature in relationship with everyone else. It is not difficult in Ghana to start up a conversation with a stranger, and it is not uncommon for such conversations to begin with approaches that Europeans feel to be uncomfortably and inappropriately intimate. A bank cashier, for example, who gives his telephone number to a (male) customer he has been joking with, or the many students who approached me in internet cafés to ask if we could correspond by email: whatever the motivation, no need is seen for preliminary introductions or to establish a relationship because the relationship is already implicitly assumed.

If people believe that there are unidentified people who wish to perform unidentified acts against them, they are also likely to see each event or occurrence in their life as deliberately caused by somebody or something. Ellis and Ter Haar (2004) remind us that it is not just in Africa that intent is sought and construed, pointing to the popularity of conspiracy theories in Western societies. However, experience of relationships as interdependent, plus acceptance of the pervasiveness and power of the spiritual allow Africans greater scope for seeing intent behind ordinary and extraordinary incidents. Such incidents are not all injurious: the examples above illustrate that relatedness is not in itself assumed to be harmful and opens up possibilities of



friendship and blessings as well as enmity and malice. As is not unique to Ghana (or Africa), however, it is less common for people to question the origin of good things that happen to them than bad things, and positive occurrences tend to be interpreted more generally as blessings from God.

Residents of Ndwumizili thus live in a world populated by a range of different powers. Those identified above do not comprise a comprehensive list: there are a multitude of other powers, including the state in all its guises; NGOs and civil society organisations; commercial corporations; the media; foreign governments and supranational bodies. I focus on the former because they are personalised figures close to people's everyday lives; however, the latter are not entirely non-spiritual powers: the spiritual is a part of each of them. While the state, for example, is officially based on secular principles, political power is strongly associated with spiritual power. Leaders may be (or wish to be) perceived as blessed and sent by God<sup>36</sup>, as exemplified by Johnson Asiedu-Nketia, General Secretary of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), who was quoted by the Ghana News Agency as stating: "All that we are saying is thank you God for the protection and wisdom in choosing a presidential candidate who will eventually become the next President of the Republic of Ghana", and continuing to declare that "the NDC had been very religious and would continue to interact, fellowship and seek divine guidance from men of God" (Ghana News Agency 2006). Leaders may also be suspected (and are usually accused) of acquiring their power through juju (see Akosah-Sarpong's (2004) article entitled *Kufuor and the Juju Talks*).

All of these powers are capable of influencing and intervening in people's lives, and all are to varying extents open to negotiation. They must therefore be taken into consideration as people go about managing their daily existence, seeking both to

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<sup>36</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, presented himself as the ultimate messianic figure in his 'Verandah Boys' Creed': 'I believe in the Convention People's Party / The opportune Saviour of Ghana; / And in Kwame Nkrumah its founder and leader; / Who is endowed with the Ghana Spirit; / Born a true Ghanaian for Ghana; / Suffering under victimisations; / Was vilified, threatened with deportation; / He disentangled himself from the clutches of the UGCC / And the same day he rose victorious with the 'verandah boys' / Ascended the Political Heights / And sitteth at the Supreme head of the CPP / From whence he shall demand Full Self-government for Ghana; / I believe in Freedom for all peoples; / Especially the New Ghana; / The Abolition of Slavery; / The liquidation of Imperialism; / The Victorious end of our Struggle, its glory and its pride; / And the Flourish of Ghana, for ever and ever.'

align themselves with and to influence the powers. This is often not straightforward: as the powers are mostly perceived in the form of agents with interests and volition, and as many of them remain largely unseen, they do not necessarily conform to functional laws of cause and effect. Interactions with powers are thus characterised by a sense of unpredictability and uncertainty, accentuated by the fact that not all perceptions of them are identical. Churches provide varying constructions of these powers and frameworks through which to negotiate them, and in the following sections I discuss those of the Musama Disco Christo Church and the Assemblies of God.

## **Church Conceptualisations of the World**

### ***Musama Disco Christo Church***

#### **History**

The Musama Disco Christo Church was founded in the early 1920s. Its leader, formerly known as Joseph William Egyanka Appiah, had worked as a Methodist catechist in Gomoa Dunkwa and then Gomoa Oguan, in the Central Region of Ghana (inhabited by the Fante people group), during which time he received visions and revelations from God informing him that he was a prophet and would become a king.<sup>37</sup> Appiah started to perform miracles of healing and established a special prayer group, later to be named *Egyidifu Kwu* ('Faith Society'), within his church which focused on 'spiritual' activities of fasting, dreams, visions and faith healing. Within this group his status as a prophet was consolidated through several divine revelations and visitations of the Holy Spirit, often via a woman named Hannah Barnes who, among other spiritual experiences, claimed to have been taken up into heaven twice by angels. In 1922 Barnes was informed by angels that she would bear a son by Appiah who would become the leader of a new church, and her name was changed to Natholomoa, the meaning of which was given as 'Queen Mother'. The following year Appiah was dismissed from the Methodist church on the grounds of employing occult practices and, after protests against him on the part of the residents of the town, left with his followers to a place called Onyaawonsu, where he became engaged to Natholomoa and received his new name, Jemisemiham Jehu-Appiah.

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<sup>37</sup> For a more detailed account of the origins of the MDCC, see Baëta 1962, pp. 28-67.

Appiah and Natholomoa later had their respective honorific titles *Akaboha* and *Akatitibi* conferred upon them by heaven, which have been continued by subsequent leaders of the church. Hence the grandson of Appiah, the most recent head of the MDCC<sup>38</sup>, is known as Prophet Miritaiah Jonah Jehu-Appiah, Akaboha III.

The name *Musama Disco Christo*, meaning ‘Army of the Cross of Christ’ in the heavenly language given to Appiah, was also revealed by God, and the church was established in 1925, when the group bought land near Gomoa Abodom to create their own settlement, having come into conflict with the people of Onyaawonsu over a refusal to participate in communal service on Fridays, which they had set apart as a rest-day. The new site was named *Mozano*, meaning ‘my town’ in the same language (which is known simply as ‘Tongue’) and the removal there was “carried out in such a manner as to be reminiscent of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt” (Baëta 1962: 37). Several years later when the church relocated to a different site adjacent to Gomoa Eshiem the name was retained, the two locations referred to as ‘Old Mozano’ and ‘New Mozano’ respectively.

Despite the conflicts with local residents, the MDCC has strong links with Fante culture. The female pastor of the Ndwumizili station relates the origins of the church as follows:

...wherever [the Faith Society members] go they sacked them—they burned their shed and they sacked them. So God revealed to [the Prophet] that, okay, now, I’m showing you another place. Go further for eight miles. You will see a big tree there. You stay there, there’s a village behind it. Stay there. And they will come to you again, as you should leave the place. But when they come to you, ask them what they are using for their culture, you see, before they can allow you to stay there, take their culture, add it to your church, and then they can allow you to stay. ... So we use our local material to make the thing. So, try to accept them whatever they tell you so that they allow you to stay. So this is what God revealed to him. So we copied from—apart from, you are saying the good news, you are giving healing. But add their culture, I mean, in their dancing or their singing, take it. Whatever—they have some local ... praying groups—take their, whatever they are using during that time and make music and attach to the church, [so] they can allow you to stay. So this is the plan that he took and then he was allowed to stay there.

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<sup>38</sup> Recently dismissed over allegations of sexual misconduct.

**Picture 5.3 : The most recent Head Prophet of the MDCC.**



**Picture 5.4 : Women dancing during an MDCC service. The woman in the foreground is wearing a T-shirt and headscarf marking the church's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1997 and bearing the images of the founder, Jemisemiham Jehu-Appiah, and his wife, Natholomoa.**



From this perspective the very foundation of the church is its embracing of local culture, which is reflected to a certain extent in its structure and practices (see Opoku 1978). The structure of prophets, priests and healers in the MDCC parallels the chiefs, elders and priests of Akan traditional society. The head of the church, the Akaboha, like Akan chiefs, is considered to be appointed by God and sacred, endowed with great spiritual wealth, thus “entitled to obedience, reverence or worship” (Antwe 1980: 300). Opoku describes the figure of the Akaboha as follows:

The *Oman* [Akan state] of Musama is headed by the Akaboha (King) who is called *Nana* [the title of all Akan chiefs] by his followers and he is every bit an Akan chief. His titles are the same as those given to Akan chiefs and he is greeted with salutations reserved for chiefs and kings. He is greatly revered, and as a sign of the reverence accorded him, sandals and footwear are removed in his presence, and women kneel in greeting him.

As a king, he never goes anywhere unaccompanied by his elders and attendants, including a linguist [counsellor, diplomat, spokesman] and an umbrella bearer. He has his own regalia, including swords, umbrellas, palanquins, linguist staffs, gilded sandals and hats, horns and drums. The Akaboha’s position as a chief is recognized by traditional chiefs in the area who invite him to their state functions and are in turn invited to attend the church’s annual Peace Festival at Mozano. (Opoku 1978: 118)

The MDCC leadership is extremely hierarchical and to a large extent knowledge is esoteric, with certain office-holding members, in particular the Akaboha, receiving divine revelations which are not necessarily fit for common knowledge: a pamphlet published by the church and defending this aspect of the MDCC reads, “secrets are sometimes necessary because Jesus himself taught that it is unwise to cast one’s pearls before swine. ... Not all people are mature or sincere enough” (Jehu-Appiah 1994: unpaginated). The major annual festival of the church, the Peace Festival Celebration, held at the end of August for a period of about ten days and marking the anniversary of the birth of Akaboha II, includes the Piodama meeting at which African dress (instead of Musama robes and dresses) is always worn, and which strongly resembles the durbars of Fante culture. Polygamy is also accepted, an issue on which the MDCC has faced severe criticism from many other churches (see Jehu-Appiah 1994). However, the church rejects the worship of idols or non-Christian gods, stating as one of its core beliefs: “We believe in a Christian’s effort to trample

down idolatry, occultism, fetishism, jujuism, spiritualism, secret orders and all other sorts of superstition” (Baëta 1962: 154). A distinction is thus made between cultural forms and practices that can be adopted by the church and those that contravene church doctrine and biblical truth. In effect, since many of the practices of the MDCC mirror those of Fante culture, both in organisation and in style, it appears to be less the forms themselves that are distinguished between as the particular powers to which they are addressed. Similar practices may be carried out, but on church grounds instead of at fetish shrines, addressed to Jesus and angels instead of to *abosom*, and using different words and symbols. Aspects of culture that are not perceived to oppose Christianity are upheld: for example, the church includes in its prayers local traditional leaders such as the chief of Ndwumizili. Despite the statement above, the local MDCC does not appear to engage in much ‘trampling down’ of idolatry, fetishism and other such practices outside of its own church community. The pastor is happy to attend (although not to participate directly in) ceremonies where libation is poured to ancestors, justifying this with the biblical quotation “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”<sup>39</sup>.

On the other hand, the MDCC also retains aspects of its Methodist heritage (Opoku 1978: 113), including slightly adapted versions of some liturgy (for example the Lord’s prayer and the Creed), the Synod and numerous societies for things such as prayer, music and healing, and the *Musama Hymn Book*, paralleling its Methodist equivalent. Other characteristics of mainstream churches are also evident, such as the use of rosaries and the elaborate dress of the Akaboha from the Catholic church and the choral gowns worn more generally by gospel choirs. Since one of the basic tenets of the church is equal belief in both Old and New Testaments, elements of Jewish symbolism are also evident, for instance the practice of animal sacrifice and the existence of the ‘Holy of Holies’ in Mozano, which houses the MDCC’s own Ark of the Covenant.

Regarding its sense of itself in relation to other churches, the MDCC appears to maintain a rather relativist stance, easily accepting the legitimacy of other denominations despite differences in practice and doctrine. Another of its core beliefs states: “We believe in all other Christian Churches” (Baëta 1962: 154; Antwe

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<sup>39</sup> Matthew 22:21.

1980: 357). When asked why there are so many different churches, the Ndwumizili pastor used the analogy of fingers of different lengths on one hand, explaining, “God made it like that”. This attitude reflects the MDCC’s identification with Fante culture and the localised, small-scale nature of West African society, where different people groups with their own deities and social structures live in close proximity without feeling the need to impose these on each other (although they may fight over land and other resources, sometimes including the perceived power of certain gods). The MDCC is located within and shaped around a specific cultural setting and, while it welcomes people from outside that setting (even white British researchers), it does not claim universality for its own doctrines and practices, although it now boasts branches in the UK and USA as well as other African countries. Indeed, based around practice and ritual rather than the written word, there is considerable scope for flexibility and creativity within MDCC traditions (see Brenner 1989; Comaroff & Comaroff 1993a). This is particularly the case since, although they have some training at the church headquarters, pastors are left to choose their own sermon topics, and the resources available to them are generally publications from the Pentecostal and mainstream sections of the Christian spectrum. Charismatic churches especially focus a lot of energy into disseminating themselves and their messages through the media, in particular television and radio programmes, and I often observed the Ndwumizili MDCC pastor absorbing these with a notebook in hand, for use in her own sermons.

The MDCC does, however, have a sense of being persecuted for its beliefs and practices. Many mainstream and Pentecostal churches criticise the Musama church for, among other things, its acceptance of polygamy, emphasis on angels, practice of animal sacrifice, veneration of the Head Prophet and use of items such as crosses, rings, candles, incense and oil; it is often considered as not Christian and sometimes accused of juju and occultism. The sensitivity of the church’s leaders to such criticism is demonstrated by the publication in 1994 of a pamphlet defending and explaining the practices listed above, which concludes:

It is curious that some churches should revel in attacking other churches or look down on them. Inferiority complex sparks that off, though it may look on the outside that it is superiority complex. Remember the shameful acts of Joshua and the disciples and how they were rebuked by Moses and the Lord Jesus (Num. 11: 27-29; Mark 9: 38-40). No church can complete the task of winning the

world for Christ alone. Infact [sic], even more churches are needed for the harvest than we have now. So why allow the devil to knock the heads of churches one against the other? We rejoice that other churches are fulfilling the task with us (Luke 10: 1,2; Phil. 1: 18). The Bible continues to be our unerring guide in matters of organisation, administration and general worship. We believe in the Holy Musama church. But we believe also in all true Christian churches of the world. May we all gather in the harvest in the name and power of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jehu-Appiah 1994)

This sense of hostility is not readily apparent at the grassroots level of the village church, where members and leaders of different churches usually maintain respectful relationships or friendships.

## Cosmology

The cosmological system of the MDCC entails a complex angelology including personal guardian angels, a ‘Ruling Angel’ for each year and seven key angels, each with a particular assignment:

Michael	Angel of Defence
Gabriel	Angel of Intercession
Raphael	Angel of Healing
Mardmiel	Angel of Maternal Care
Zadkiel	Angel of Prosperity
Zaphiel	Angel of Guidance
Harniel	Angel of Deliverance in Travail.

(Myles n.d.: 18)

These angels and their associated roles are recognised uniquely within the MDCC, having been made known to the Akaboha through divine revelation. They can be called upon by Musama members; by far the most commonly invoked in communal prayers in Ndwumizili is Michael, whose name is often called during evening prayers and before embarking on long journeys. The *abosom* or ‘small gods’ are seen as fallen angels who left heaven with Lucifer and landed on earth at the places they now inhabit.



While juju is abhorred, the manipulation of spiritual powers for evil purposes is recognised and taken seriously, as demonstrated by the following story (one of many) mentioned in a sermon:

There is this current news that says a young woman, between the ages of 23 and 27, came to be a pastor with some supernatural spirit or whatever, to get to people, tell them strange things and take their vehicles or cars from them. She has succeeded in taking about 40 cars from individuals. ... She has just been detained, nobody is demanding her life. And look at what Jesus did, he did so many wonderful things and the Jews were demanding his death. (MDCC service, 13/04/06)

Such tales are not far-removed from the lives of the congregation: in the same sermon came the following warning:

Sometimes people simply hate you for nothing. Even in our daily lives, people go to fetish priests and voodoo men to ask their friends or relatives or whatever to be killed, for no apparent reason.

The concept of enemies, along with jealousy, betrayal, persecution and attack, is therefore accepted as an inevitable part of life. Other dangers also abound (some of which may, of course, be caused by enemies): prayer for good health, protection of jobs and businesses, safe travel and safety for fishermen at sea all feature commonly as prayer requests. Whatever the immediate threat, there is a strong sense of the ubiquitous presence of danger: protection is a constant subject of prayer, both as a request and in thanksgiving. These may be prayers relating to unspecified dangers, for example: “God, you protected and led me into this place; when I’m going back protect and lead me back”; “I commit my brothers and sisters and entire family into the hands of the Almighty God for his protection”; “May God protect us all”. They may also refer to specific dangers, such as travel risks (for instance for family members due to travel to a forthcoming funeral); occupational hazards (“God protect and guide all fishermen”); and threats to income (“May the Lord protect all of us, including our jobs and businesses”).

Misfortune is therefore variously attributed to a range of causes and sometimes a combination of more than one. It can be brought about by deliberate attack (through either spiritual or physical means) from human or spiritual enemies. It can also be

caused by one's own actions, through sin. The ultimate source of misfortune, however, is the devil, who works through any and all of the above channels, setting traps and planning setbacks and disasters which need to be protected against.

While harm comes from the devil, blessings are given by God. Ill-fortune is often construed as a lack of success in improving one's life or in achieving what is 'normal' or 'rightful'—in other words, as a failure to receive the blessings that one is due as a child of God. Blessings, however, can—and must—also be earned. They can be attained in two main ways. Firstly, through obedience and holy living, which includes giving to the church; especially important are tithes, the non-payment of which is seen as stealing from God (based on Malachi 3):

God says you've been stealing from him, and what do you steal from him? You steal from him because you do not pay regularly, or even not at all sometimes, your tithes. ... [T]here's a curse on all of you because you've been cheating me and stealing from me. Now, when you pay your tithes and do the right thing, obey my laws, I'll open the windows of heaven and bless you and give you all kinds of support that you need in your life. (MDCC service, 19/03/06)

Secondly, blessings are obtained through prayer:

Whenever we put to God all our needs and wants and demands, and rely on him and pray with faith, he will answer our prayer and give us our needs and wants. ... Oh God, that what God has promised in our life should come true. ... Let's pray and God will let it come into being. So many errors and mistakes and long suffering, but we present our requests in the name of the Lord, and whatever he has planned in our life will surely come true. (MDCC service, 19/03/06)

As indicated above, however, just as frequently as for improvements in life, prayers are for protection against harm, where the 'harm' is the denial of blessings:

Satan knows that God has blessed you with talents, skills and a very good vision, prosperity ahead of you. But the devil is also saying that how can he claim or destroy those things for you? ...[H]e doesn't want all of those blessings to come into your house to stay. So we begin to experience faulty businesses, non-profit making, all sorts of things going on around you become so bad. (MDCC service, 20/08/06)

**Picture 5.5: The main street of Mozano, showing the mausoleum of the founder in the foreground, the Jubilee Temple in the centre (venue for the main meetings) and the Holy of Holies behind. The residence of the Akaboha is behind the gates at the end of the street.**



**Picture 5.6: MDCC members worshipping at the Peace Festival.**



**Picture 5.7: MDCC choir parading at the Peace Festival.**



**Picture 5.8: Stall in Mozano selling rings, crosses, oil, rosaries, incense and other MDCC paraphernalia.**



## ***Assemblies of God***

### **History and scope**

The Assemblies of God church in Ghana was originally an American mission which entered the country (then the Gold Coast) in January 1931 from the Upper Volta (Burkina Faso). The first mission stations were therefore established in the north of the Gold Coast, where until that point only Catholic missions had a presence. About fifteen years later work began in the south, and in 1970 the Americans relinquished control of the church when Elijah Nyamela Panka became the first Ghanaian to be elected General Superintendent. The AG is now considered a fully Ghanaian Pentecostal church. It is structured around districts and regions and, while leaders and pastors are respected according to their position, they are not venerated. Unlike the MDCC, it considers its beliefs and values to be universally applicable. This is clearly shown in its mission statement:

Our Mission: To bring God's people together for the purpose of worship and carrying out the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the world through evangelism, discipleship, teaching of the word and to minister to the total needs of the people within their cultural setting without compromising the statement of our fundamental truths.

Our Vision: To Evangelise Ghana and beyond.

(Ghana Evangel 2006: 3)

Cultural values and practices are thus decidedly subordinate to the doctrines of the church, which were defined outside the local cultural context (not outside the national context, although they are of course strongly linked with the American AG doctrinal statement). Although there is no outward hostility at the village level, the AG regards churches such as the MDCC and the Church of the Twelve Apostles as unchristian and using occult practices—although this view is not necessarily shared by all AG members.

The MDCC thus appears more accepting of difference and more relativistic than the AG, which tends to claim universality in its beliefs. This contrast in outlook is illustrated in the ways in which they related to me, as a semi-regular attendee of each church coming from a very different cultural, racial and geographic background. In

the AG church I was invited and encouraged to attend all meetings and activities; at services I was seated—albeit on the front row—among the congregation with the rest of the women; and the pastor included me in his visits to church members and demonstrated concern for my moral and spiritual wellbeing. In the MDCC, on the other hand, although I lodged with the pastor and her family I was not always invited to or informed about meetings (although when I expressed an interest in attending I was always welcomed), and at services I was consistently—and despite protests—directed to a chair positioned next to the pastor at the front of the church, facing the congregation. This variation could partly be due to the stronger sense of hierarchy in the MDCC as well as the difference in levels of education and fluency in English between the two congregations, with many members of the AG better able to communicate with me and less disposed to give me special status. It could also reflect my own reactions to the churches, the MDCC being somewhat more ‘other’ to me than the AG. However, a third reason for differences in how the AG and MDCC view and act towards other Christians and churches outside their own denominations is likely to lie in their sense of identity and history as a church. The MDCC, as we have seen above, was initiated indigenously in Ghana. Its current headquarters remains within a few miles of the birthplace of its founder, the church exists largely in the southern half of the country (although it also boasts a few branches as far away as the UK and the USA), and one of its founding principles was to base itself on local cultural practices. The very specificity of culture and religion in West Africa engenders a relativistic outlook: gods are not only largely territorial but also personified; religion is less about fundamental truths than about interacting with particular spirits as and when necessary. Appiah highlights this contrast between African (and other) religions and world religions such as Christianity and Islam by quoting Chinua Achebe: “I can’t imagine Igbos traveling four thousand miles to tell anybody their worship was wrong!” (Achebe, cited in Appiah 1992: 114). The MDCC, then, founded on a basis of relevance to culture; with strong links to traditions of localisation; and without external reference points, does not insist on universality in its practices (although it welcomes anyone from outside its culture of origin) and is therefore able to accept a far wider range of Christian denominations than are Pentecostal churches.

The AG, on the other hand, while counting itself a fully Ghanaian church, also identifies itself with a global movement whose fundamental beliefs and values were

established outside the national context. In a speech read out at regional celebrations of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the AG in Ghana, the General Superintendent highlights this identity:

Assemblies of God, which is a worldwide body currently the largest and leading Pentecostal church in the world was born out of the Azusa Street revival, with the latter's centenary anniversary being celebrated this year in the United States of America.

From its humble beginning the church has spread to every continent with a worldwide membership of about thirty million people and eleven million in Africa. The church in Ghana has enjoyed a fair share of growth with a population of about 800,000 members.

It will interest you to know that the single largest church in the world with a membership of about 700,000 adults is an Assemblies of God church, located in South Korea and pastored by Dr. David Yongi Cho.

This extract refers not only to the global AG church, but also to its affiliation with the wider Pentecostal movement. In recent years a substantial body of literature has emerged around the topic of Pentecostalism and its transnational nature, for example Allan 2004; Van Dijk 2002, 2004; Englund 2003; Gifford 2004a; Martin 2001; and in particular the contributory volume *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, edited by Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001). Emphasis is placed on the missionary zeal to evangelise other nations, involving ongoing circulation of evangelists between countries and continents; the use of glossolalia, “a tongue which transcends any national language” (César 2001: 32-33); the individualist nature of being ‘born again’ legitimating and facilitating upward mobility and access to global markets (Meyer 1998a); the enhanced role of religion in identity politics where “nation-states and nationalism no longer necessarily constitute the primary physical and ideological contexts in which identity and community are imagined and political allegiance expressed” (Marshall-Fratani 2001: 81); the use of media connecting members of churches to global networks (*ibid.*). Although, as we have seen above, members of the AG in Ndwumizili are still firmly located within their cultural context, which informs their values, actions and morality, the church sees itself as part of a far wider ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983) stretching across the globe, whose moral referents transcend the locality.

## The world

The local church, however, cannot but exist within its ‘cultural setting’, which inevitably influences the way its members see the world. Thus, while the second item on the AG doctrinal statement reads: “There is one God, eternally existent in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost” (Ghana Evangel 2006: 3), this does not preclude the existence of other spiritual powers (such as *abosom*, ancestors and evil spirits), or the possibility of accessing spiritual power in ways other than through God (for instance through witchcraft and juju). As we have seen, in Ghanaian society such concepts are rarely questioned but rather accepted as fact. In the first part of this chapter (pp.135-136; 139-140) it is noted that deities and ancestors were considered neutral rather than evil; however, the growth of Christianity—and in particular Pentecostalism, which actively engages with such concepts instead of ignoring them or denying their existence—has had the effect of demonising them (Ellis & Ter Haar 2004; Hackett 2003). In Pentecostalism these spiritual beings, along with witchcraft and juju, are seen as sinister and demonic, and deliverance from them forms a key element of Pentecostal discourse. Evil powers are seen as very real, threatening and omnipresent on an everyday level: explaining his late arrival at church one Sunday the pastor of the Ndwumizili AG commented, “witchcraft is all around us at all times, that can cause such minor problems in our lives to delay certain things” (07/05/06). On the other hand, church members do not all or consistently construct *abosom* as inherently evil: although Kwaku, for example, describes them as “from the devil”, on another occasion he used the biblical teaching concerning submission to the “governing authorities” (Romans 13:1) to justify respect for taboos set by deities. While respecting the chief as a traditional figure of authority, the AG church does not recognise his inherent sacredness. Unlike the MDCC pastor, the AG pastor avoids attending traditional festivals or ceremonies at which libation is poured: if he is in attendance he may request that a prayer be uttered instead, and if this is denied he is likely to leave.

As in the wider society, witchcraft is a danger associated primarily, although not exclusively, with the family:

...there are some evil spirits or witches even within our own families who don't want you to progress, and so they fight against that. ... Sometimes even your child will have a dream and will tell you, the mum or dad. Then you will go and tell other people, “oh,



this is the dream my child had last night.” What do you think? You might probably mistakenly tell the evil one in your family or in the community, and spiritually they will fight against the progress of your child or the dream. (Natasha, AG sermon, 30/04/06)

As this example shows, demonic forces are concerned with hindering progression just as much as with causing explicit harm. When things are not advancing one has just as much reason to suspect evil as when disaster falls. Members of the AG church therefore hold a similar perspective to members of the MDCC in that harm can be construed as a denial of blessings, intentionally caused by some specific agent and ultimately by the devil. On the other hand and also in both churches, the absence or avoidance of harm is interpreted as blessing, as the following testimony given during a Sunday service illustrates:

On Saturday I found my child with a bottle of kerosene in her hand, which I had put in the corner of the kitchen. So I came in from outside and realised that the child had poured all this kerosene over her body. I thought the child had actually drunk the kerosene, but God being such a great and marvellous and dependable father, the child had just dropped all the kerosene on her body and on the ground, but none entered her mouth. So I give thanks to God for saving my child. (Esther, AG service, 07/05/06)

This story, one of several like it, is an example of an explicit danger that has been avoided (which could, and may in Esther’s mind, also be interpreted as a deliberate attack). However, there is also a high level of awareness of unidentified dangers from which one is continually being protected and saved. As in the MDCC, every service includes prayers of thanksgiving and supplication for protection:

Oh our Lord, ... you’ve protected us and you continue to protect us. When you protect us for another week ... we shall give praise to you, we shall glorify you and say hallelujah to your holy name. (Dan, AG service, 06/08/06)

There is therefore no middle ground: one is either being blessed or being attacked, and an absence of explicitly good or bad events can be construed as either scenario or both—but never neither. A lack of progression indicates evil powers at work, while a lack of regression implies blessing.

‘Blessings’ are considered to derive uniquely from God. In basic terms, all good things come from God and all evil things originate from the devil. While evil spiritual power can be used to prosper oneself, wealth acquired in this way will not last: everything obtained through evil means will eventually be lost, as the AG pastor explains:

The blessing of God and his favour will shine upon you wherever you go and people will recognise that. Some people get rich through various other means, like some people might get rich, have a lot of houses and cars and all the luxury things in life, and people might stay somewhere wondering why such a person is so rich. But sometimes some of these people don’t choose the right way to get the money. Let’s say such a person might deal with cocaine or any other evil means of getting rich. One day such a person might be caught and brought to the news on the television or wherever, and people will realise, oh, that is the source of his wealth, that’s too bad. This time the rich man who has been given so much property loses the property and the love the society might have for him. (AG service, 09/04/06)

Unexplained loss of wealth is given a spiritual interpretation, as evil receiving its comeuppance:

Virtually everything Job had was destroyed, to the extent that people started talking about—if it were today, we would easily think that probably he might have the money from some evil force, probably some juju or any other devious way of getting rich. (Sunday school teacher, AG Easter convention, 16/04/06)

Thus, in the fundamental battle between God and the devil—between good and evil—God is attributed ultimate victory. Blessings are promised and identified, both in this life and in the shape of heaven, the destiny of all born-again Christians. A large proportion of the prayers and most of the songs in AG services are about praising the wondrous works of God and giving thanks for what he has done in the lives of the congregation, whether through specific testimonies or on a more general level. As in the MDCC, blessings are obtained by obeying God and living holy lives (including attending church and making offerings), and by constant prayer.

Similar again to the MDCC, the devil, then, is considered the ultimate source of all evil, actively working through human and spiritual forces to inflict harm and prevent

the fulfilment of God's plans. All evil, whether manifested through witchcraft, 'small gods', juju or other means is attributed to the devil. He (like God, the devil is invariably referred to as male) is also the cause of all social vices and immorality which, church members are often reminded, abound in Ghanaian society (and particularly in Ndwumizili). The moral status and standards of Christians is a frequent (virtually weekly) topic in AG services, with exhortations against "worldly enjoyment, like drinking, fornication, adultery, worshipping of idols, all sorts of evil things, we need to try to avoid them in our lives and commit ourselves entirely to God" (Anna, Sunday school contribution, 30/04/06). The world is full of bad influences, ready to trip up Christians and lure them into sin and away from God's plan for their life. The AG differs from the MDCC in this area, not in its official condemnation of sin or even in what is labelled as sinful (with the exception of certain practices of the MDCC, such as polygamy, discussed above), but rather in the extent to which sinful practices are tolerated within the church. While, for example, an unmarried woman who falls pregnant faces suspension or expulsion from the AG (as was recently the case in the other church overseen by the Ndwumizili pastor), within the MDCC she is free to continue attending without disciplinary measures.

The social world is also a place of danger, due not only to witchcraft, but also harm caused by jealousy, gossip and deception. Trust is not given freely as the risk of betrayal is high. Sometimes, when relating a plan or a hope for the future, or the acquisition of some money or an opportunity, people would request me not to tell anybody else, "because some people can get jealous". In the sermon referred to above, Natasha uses the Old Testament story of Joseph being mistreated and sold by his brothers to warn of the risks of revealing one's dreams to others:

When we have a dream, anything good, it is better for us to keep it and control our tongue and mouth so that the enemy doesn't get access to it and destroy our future plans and arrangements.  
(Natasha, AG sermon, 30/04/06)

The 'enemy' here may refer to the devil, but it may also refer to human adversaries, the identity of whom one may or may not be aware of, whether strangers, acquaintances, friends or family members. It is also important to note that these fears do not just emerge from biblical or other teaching; they are constructed through lived

experience interpreted through one's view of reality, which is informed by these teachings. The next example Natasha uses in her sermon is of her sister, who

happened to have a visa to travel to Germany. When she had a visa she almost told everybody in the village that she was going to travel. By the time she realised she was refused entry at Frankfurt airport, so she was deported. So when she came back she fasted and prayed again. But this time around she did not tell anybody until she got to Germany, before she called back home and told some few family members.

Travel to the Western world is a dream cherished by many Ghanaians, and made all the more valuable by the scarcity of visas. It is not only the opportunities perceived to be available within the country of destination that are valued: just the fact of travelling is seen as success, greatly enhancing one's status. The sister's deportation was thus attributed to the actions of an unidentified person who intervened—in this case spiritually—to prevent her from achieving her aim and advancing herself by entering Germany.

**Picture 5.9: AG pastors worshipping at the annual Easter convention, wearing 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary cloth.**



**Picture 5.10: Dancing at the AG 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, wearing anniversary T-shirts and caps.**



**Picture 5.11: AG regional office, Takoradi.**



**Picture 5.12: Parade through Takoradi, part of the 75th anniversary celebrations.**



## Conclusion

While belief may be intrinsic to Christianity in the Western world, in Africa religion is not necessarily constructed or experienced in the same way. Rather than an emphasis on actively believing in God, his existence is viewed as a fact of life. The same is true for other spiritual beings and forces such as *abosom* and juju: whether or not they exist is not a religious question—indeed, it is rarely questioned at all.

The world inhabited by the residents of Ndwumizili does not consist purely in what is visible. The physical and the spiritual are not just related; they are part of the same continuum. This world is populated by a range of powers including, among others, God (*Nyame*); secondary deities (*abosom*); practitioners of juju; witches; chiefs and traditional authorities; ancestors; and family authorities. Each of these powers has the potential to intervene in people's lives, although the extent and nature of their power is neither static nor non-negotiable. They tend to be personified and personalised, perceived as agents with specific interest in people's lives. As such, even God and *abosom* can be negotiated with, the latter far more than the former, as *abosom* are seen as finite beings with limited power. If they—or other powers—do not produce results, people are likely to stop interacting with them. On the other hand, the powers—by definition—are powerful and not necessarily compliant with the manipulations of humans: to some extent people are subject to their will.

One impact of the growing influence of Christianity seems to be the heightened distinction between good and evil spiritual power, with the demonisation of powers such as ancestors, *abosom* and juju practitioners, and the introduction of the devil as a personalised and malevolent source of all evil. While church discourses construct spiritual beings other than those of God (i.e. God as manifested in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and angels) as inherently evil, ancestors and deities are still held in respect by church members and, in the MDCC, pastors. The notion of evil as close and ubiquitous in a society in which interdependence and communality are fundamental results in ambivalent relationships, especially within the family, which is the most common source of both support and enmity. While harm originates from the devil and is often aimed at preventing a person or a community from progressing, blessings come from God and benefit or advance that person or community. Harm

and blessings are in a sense two sides of the same coin: the absence of each can be seen as the presence of the other. It is therefore important both to protect oneself from harm and actively to seek blessings, both of which objectives, according to the MDCC and the AG, are to be achieved through the church.

Although very different in origin, the MDCC and AG churches thus actually have a similar view of the world, as described above, notwithstanding the intricacies of the MDCC's angelology. Where they differ is firstly in their construction of knowledge and leadership, as esoteric and revered in the MDCC and open and equal in the AG and, secondly, in their sense of their position as a church within the wider Christian (and non-Christian) community: relativist and isolated in the case of the MDCC, and universalist and part of a global community for the AG. The two churches also differ greatly in their practices, which will be discussed in the following two chapters as the significance of these similarities and differences in terms of how people manage the world is considered.

'Religion', in the social science use of the word, is clearly important to social life in Ghana, in that no area of life is free from a spiritual dimension. Religion is not compartmentalised off into the private sphere. However, neither is it a totalising concept, since this spiritual dimension may not be considered by Ghanaians as 'religious'. People do not necessarily opt into or actively choose to 'believe in' whole religions, to the exclusion of other whole religions. Rather, the powers which may to an outsider represent such religions simply exist as factual beings or forces on a continuous landscape, and the issue that people face becomes how to manage them. It is therefore entirely possible to live in a range of different discourses simultaneously, negotiating and marshalling these powers pragmatically in order to acquire blessings and to protect oneself and others from harm. Such marshalling, however, is not straightforward or consistent, not only because of the tension between the extent to which people can engage with and are subject to the powers, but also because their very natures are contested. Scepticism and doubt of course exist within Ghanaian society, and the nature and legitimacy of some of the powers (for example juju, churches, witchcraft, chiefs) are frequently and hotly debated in the media. Their existence is rarely questioned, although educated elites and those with high exposure to the Western world sometimes refer to fetish rituals and taboos as 'superstition'. In the village, debate more commonly occurs around the



interpretation of specific events and situations: a death, for example, might be seen by some as due to entirely natural causes and by others as witchcraft, while many may remain unsure of how to attribute it. In the end, where doubt and uncertainty persist, where one is promised blessings or threatened with harm by forces of which one is not sure, the most rational course of action is often to take these threats and promises seriously.

## **Marshalling the Powers: Continuities Between Religions**

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter has argued that, rather than choosing between alternative belief systems or religious traditions, residents of Ndwumizili are likely to view and experience the world as inhabited by a range of powers which have the capacity to influence their lives for better or for worse, and in relation to which they must therefore position themselves to their maximum advantage. Such an understanding sheds a different light on the ways in which people act and relate in society: seemingly indiscriminate movements between conflicting religious discourses become logical, pragmatic and coherent actions to mobilise resources and protect from threats. This perspective therefore challenges some of the categories and divisions usually applied by social science theoreticians and practitioners in their approaches to religion. Two such divisions are the separation of what can be thought of as ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’, which is discussed in Chapter 7, and the division between different religious traditions, considered below. As discussed in Chapter 2 (pp.34-39), studies of Christianity in Africa have tended, even when attempting to ‘Africanise’ Christianity, to treat Christianity and ‘African’ as separate categories. Pentecostal churches in particular are viewed as aligning themselves with modernity in opposition to culture, partly due to the latter’s inherent associations with traditional religion. I therefore base my discussion of continuities between religious traditions on the relationship between Christianity and culture, and how this is played out in people’s lives and within the MDC and AG churches, focussing on two central themes: how problems are approached and how relatedness is negotiated. I also consider assumed divisions between religious traditions within Christianity, exploring movement and continuity between denominational and sectoral categories. I start with a discussion of the construction of moral frameworks in relation to Christianity, culture and modernity.

## Moral Frameworks

As Olivier de Sardan (1999) argues, Africans do not simply live within one coherent moral framework, having had various normative systems superimposed over each other in the political and juridical spheres through successive eras (something which is, of course, not only true for Africans). With the onset of globalisation and expanding communications there are also many more points of contact and increased access to different cultures and moral systems. As argued in Chapter 2 (pp.47-50), it is not easy—or necessarily useful—to approach these as separate and discrete cultural discourses; rather, in order to understand how morality is constructed by the subjects of this study, it is more useful to start with their own perceptions of morality and immorality in relation to such discourses.

As in any society moral standards and attitudes vary, but certain facets of behaviour are regularly viewed through a moral lens. Courtesy and respect are important, both in general terms (“maybe they like insulting other people ... when they see them they don’t greet them” (Vincent, 20, irregular AG member)) and in more specific power relationships such as the teenage girl being severely chided for refusing to demonstrate appropriate respect to an older, male visitor by ceding way to him on the stairs (see Chapter 7 p.215). The AG pastor emphasises two areas when admonishing the morality of his congregation: firstly sexual conduct, referring to both pre- and extra-marital sex and, secondly, the consultation of ‘small gods’:

You hear very bad news from Christians, from their behaviour ... like a church member or Christian may have his wife at home and then be going out with the girlfriend. It’s very furious and very disturbing. Yes, as a Christian, you’re going out with your girlfriend—is that the will of God? As a Christian you consult other gods. Is that the will of God? Sometimes even they don’t go themselves, but they tell other people to go and consult small gods. Is that the will of God? As a Christian or a church elder, you tell people to go and consult small gods, as they call it. Look at the disgrace. (AG service, 12/03/06)

Other issues frequently mentioned in relation to morality during sermons, Bible classes and church discussions are alcohol, smoking (mainly tobacco but also

marijuana), frequenting nightclubs, theft, gossip, fighting, quarrelling and immodest dress.

Christian constructions of what is moral or immoral are based on alignment with the will of God, and in both the MDCC and the AG the Bible is taken to be the authority on this: “We believe only in the Holy bible [sic] and all its teachings as teachings from God” (MDCC statement of belief, Antwe 1980: 357); “The Bible is the inspired and only infallible and authoritative written Word of God” (AG doctrinal statement, Ghana Evangel 2006: 3). However, in their interpretation of the Bible, churches and Christians draw on other discourses to determine what is right and what is wrong. The two most clearly identified and contrasted by the subjects of this study are ‘modern’ and ‘cultural’. In much of the literature about Christianity in Africa it is assumed that Christianity and culture are separate discourses that need to be either reconciled to or left alone from each other (see Chapter 2 pp.34-39). Modernity, however, is seen to have common ground with Christianity in that both are associated with Western society, and the recent growth of Pentecostalism is linked with aspirations and attempts to negotiate and engage with modernity (Meyer 1998a). However, data from this study suggests that the situation is not so clear-cut, and in constructing moral frameworks people often align Christianity with ‘cultural’ as opposed to ‘modern’ values rather than the other way around.

### ***The ‘modern’***

The ‘modern’ is often associated with foreign influences. The recently coined colloquial term *apuskeleke* refers to Western-style, sexy clothes often worn by young women, and is defined by the ‘Ghana Unofficial Dictionary’ on the *Ghana Home Page* as follows:

**Apuskeleke** : Tight fitting trousers; Girls that like to wear tight fitted pants which displays their shape/curves.

Some Ghanaians use the words to describe the Britney Spears-inspired western clothing worn by many women in Accra, and others use it as a term of affection. Yelling “Hey, Abus!” [sic] seems to be the equivalent of “Hey, you look hot tonight”.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> [http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/dictionary/dict\\_a.php](http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/dictionary/dict_a.php), accessed 22/03/07.

This style of dress is roundly condemned by most church leaders, although more revealing clothes are worn with increasing frequency in urban church meetings. This has therefore become a matter of hot debate in Ghanaian society, with young people accused of bringing immorality into the church. A front page article in the *Daily Graphic*, one of the most popular newspapers, demonstrates the level of attention attributed to this issue. Entitled ‘Methodist Church bans mini skirt’, the article cites the President of the Union of Methodist Singing Bands as rebuking young people for “indecent dressing, which could lead to fornication and adultery [and] did not reflect the characteristics of Christ”. That the church is not solely concerned with the state of its members’ souls but also with the reflection of this on the church’s reputation is made clear later on: “He said since the church had set a target of doubling its membership by the year 2008, the hierarchy would not sit unconcerned for some misguided youth to infiltrate the church only to destroy its integrity” (*Daily Graphic* 16/09/06). This is however not such a pertinent issue in the village, where churches tend to be more conservative, less affluent and with fewer young members, and where those who attend usually wear traditional Ghanaian styles of dress.

‘Foreign’, however, does not always equate with ‘Western’. Nigerian influences are also criticised as contributing to this version of modernity. Considered by many Ghanaians as an inherently corrupt nation of vice and depravity, Nigeria nevertheless has a large presence in Ghana through trade, transnational churches and in particular television, with Nigerian movies, soap operas and reality TV shows such as *Big Brother* being broadcast daily in Ghana. These programmes tend to portray glamorous lifestyles of rich Nigerians living in Lagos and generally include, as well as Satanism and juju, strong doses of gun violence, corruption, organised crime and sexual promiscuity. The ‘modern’ fashions displayed in such media images are sometimes imitated by young Ghanaians, and usually roundly denounced by their elders. Hence, when a twenty one year old man called on me during my fieldwork, my landlady was outraged and threw him out of the house because he had had his hair braided into a zigzag pattern such as a woman might wear. The reason for her indignation was that this was a Nigerian style worn by armed robbers and bandits, and thus represented dishonesty, violence, subversion and immorality—diametrically opposed to traditional and Christian moral values. Moreover, she was extremely offended not just that a boy from the village should have his hair styled like that, but that he should come to her house in such a state. “And he comes to see you!” she

added, implying that in doing so he displayed a lack of respect and risked inferring disgrace on both of us.

‘Modernity’, of course, is not all bad. Most men do not wear the traditional cloth wrapped around the body even at special occasions (this is partly due to the high cost of the cloth), and the ‘uniform’ of Pentecostal pastors is Western-style suits. Moreover, in their association with affluence and spatial and economic mobility, modern lifestyles such as those perceived to be lived by wealthy Ghanaians in Accra or Europeans and Americans are aspired to by many. However while enjoying the technologies and conveniences that modernity brings, such as electricity and mobile telephones, there are deep concerns over the perceived erosion of morals with which it is also associated. Many adults complain about the lack of respect shown by children nowadays, often attributing it to lower levels of discipline at school and in particular the reduced use of corporal punishment. An issue of especial concern in Ndwumizili is the tourist industry. White tourists generally do not take care over their appearance or cover up their bodies as much as is normally considered decent in Ghanaian society; moreover, the weekends usually bring groups of expatriate men from the inland goldmines, creating a market for prostitution. The beach also acts as a hang-out for young pseudo-Rastafarians who smoke marijuana, drink alcohol and set up casual relationships with white female travellers. “The morality in this town is bad, bad, bad”, laments the deaconess of the AG church, having explained that “another problem is the beach, like Ndwumizili Beach [the largest hotel in the village], these white, it’s a tourist town. So you get people who come here, and that has had an effect on the town”. Thus, while modernity can be a good thing, it must be engaged with in ways that are morally acceptable.

### ***The ‘cultural’***

The second discourse, ‘cultural’, refers to customs and traditions seen as essentially Ghanaian. Some areas of a ‘Christian’ lifestyle as understood by many churches oppose traditional Ghanaian culture, for example the principle of monogamy rather than polygamy, which is forbidden by the AG and most churches although permitted in the MDCC and some other indigenous churches. Although both the AG and the MDCC hold the Bible as their authority, they do not always use or interpret it in the same way. In a Bible study the AG pastor described King Asa as a good leader who

did not follow in the traditions of his father; however, these traditions refer mainly to religious practices: Asa “removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to obey his laws and commands” (2 Chronicles 14: 3-4). Wider discussion of the significance of ‘altars’ etc. in contemporary life revolved around issues such as jealousy, rather than cultural practices. Where culture is opposed by Christianity it is usually in relation to its associations with traditional religion. However, local culture remains integral to the structure and doctrine of the MDCC despite its opposition to traditional religion. The female pastor sees no problem in taking part in traditional festivals and rituals as long as she is not expected explicitly to worship other gods, justifying this with the words of Jesus: “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Matthew 22: 21).

Far from being denounced, cultural values are very often held in high regard by Christians. Ghanaian cultural modes of dress, for example, are represented as moral and decent in opposition to the ‘modern’ fashions described above. As already noted this is a subject of much debate in Ghana, with newspapers carrying calls by church and political leaders for decent, modest dress according to Ghanaian tradition, and school textbooks attempting to inculcate such values into children.

The cultural values symbolised by certain styles of clothing and behaviour are seen to be in line with Christian values of modesty, decency and respect. Thus the importance of greetings, mentioned above, is taught in an AG Sunday school with reference to African culture:

We are Blacks, we are Africans. Greeting is part of us, so anybody you meet you should be able to greet the person, whether you know the person or not. ... That shows fairness, respect, dignity, brotherliness in society. (Pastor, AG service, 02/07/06)

In a discussion AG members agreed that:

the way you talk, *mpakyo* [excuse me], I beg you or please, ... when somebody speaks like this it’s a sign of the person being very humble etc. etc. and all these are positive aspects of our culture which of course are seen as having a reflection of Christian values. (Kwaku, AG)

Another member continued,

Being polite, honest and frank shows another area of somebody having Christian values. Though we have them culturally, yes, but in today's environment as we see some of these positive signs, then that person is a Christian. (Unknown male participant, AG)

Here we see Christian discourse viewed as in harmony with 'culture'. It is implied that cultural values such as politeness and honesty have been eroded as the culture has changed, and remain upheld only by Christians. Thus, contrary to analyses which place Christianity and African culture at variance in the imaginations of Pentecostal Africans who aspire to and indeed yearn for a modern lifestyle, here they are portrayed as being in harmony, in contrast to 'modern' influences which are considered un-Christian.

## **Approaches to Problems**

### ***Combining religions***

*It is not in one forest alone that we go to collect cane.* (Akan proverb, Appiah *et al.* 2007: 306)

As well as with non-religious strategies (discussed in Chapter 7 pp.198-208), church prayers and rituals may be combined with practices from other religious traditions. Although both the AG and the MDCC are officially strongly against all forms of juju and anything that constitutes 'worshipping other gods', in reality church members may be more pragmatic in resolving their problems. In Chapter 5 (pp.168-170) it is argued that spiritual entities such as God, *abosom* (minor deities) and ancestors are not usually 'believed in' or not as part of a particular religious system, but perceived as factual beings of whom the existence is not doubted. Conversion to Christianity does not involve a renunciation of belief in other spirits but a reframing of the spiritual landscape. Certain spirits, in particular deities, are considered demonic rather than neutral; and the distribution of and access to power are reattributed so that



the authority of ancestors, for example, can be overridden by the blood of Jesus, and blessings are received by those who pray in church. The dilemma faced by Ghanaians is not, therefore, whether or not to believe in a range of spiritual beings and in the power they wield, but how—and how far—to interact with them. Practices relating to *abosom* and juju are strictly forbidden by both churches; however, that some church members engage in them is not doubted. This is clear from admonishments given to congregations by pastors during services: in the MDCC, for example, “Some of us so-called Christians still consult other spiritual gods, which is contrary to the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ” (25/06/06); and in the AG, “As a Christian you consult other gods. Is that the will of God?” (12/03/06).

The following case, recounted by a 34 year old male AG member, provides an illustration of how different strategies from apparently conflicting or contradictory discourses can be drawn on in the face of threats and problems. Kwaku narrates events surrounding his Senior Secondary School examinations over the course of four years during his mid-twenties:

K I learned hard, still, I remember some time to my examinations, even I remember that this question, maybe a question involving politics, [came to my mind] about a week to examination, my final examination. When I got to the room I had the paper, the question paper, the question was there. But before that I even told some of my few friends that I had a dream, vision, and I saw this question, and they even were laughing at me that I’ve had malaria and because malaria makes you have series of, you know, dreams, so I should go away from them, you know, that kind of silly things, and they even had fun about that. But in reality when I got to the room the questions were there, two solid questions. So even one of my friends came, moved from the last seat about ten steps behind me, said Kwaku, what you said has really dropped, so can you help me. At that time we hadn’t sat down completely for the work to start. So I told him verbally what he should write. And I knew because having had that vision I learned seriously on that topic. So I said this question is very easy for me, so let me target the difficult ones. Before I realised, even later in the day, when I read the questions, when I came back to the question, I never even understood the question. I couldn’t understand those questions. You wouldn’t believe it. I couldn’t understand those questions so I couldn’t pass. But my friends passed.

[...]

E So why do you think that—

K You are asking me, ask God why. You should ask God why. Because, at that time I tried to be holy that, even a lady proposed to me on campus. I said no, because of my exams, no woman in my life. I devoted myself. I said no, I [must not] do all these silly things because I knew God don't like it. And after all these things, I fasted, even that was the time I fasted and I had a vision that the spirit of God he would have sent me, that there was a white dove in the vision on the top of me. Really, I do not want tell you all these things, I don't want to remember these things. And yet, I failed my exams. Can you imagine it?

E But then you re-sat them and passed.

K But it was all these wasted years, four years. That was now even the second time. So the third time I went to a spiritualist. And this spiritualist told me it's the work of the devil, the forces within my family that few members in the family, they knew God has really blessed me with something, but they don't want those things to come to be so that I prosper. So they pray in the mentality that what God gave me, they've taken it away. So even when I learn, I forget it. So, he prepared something with honey. I don't know anything that he added to [it]. But I remember I bought the honey and a whole pot of honey, and he told me you will mix it with something and you will drink. Even at that time it was left about three months or a month to the exams again, so I didn't come early, but let's hope God will, you know, miracles he performs. So, at that time I went back to the exam room. And even after about six years something that I was taught, that I did not even revise, a question came and I remembered all those things. And that time I passed.

E So what does that mean, then? That the spiritualist, you think that what he did worked?

K Sure, it did work, that is my belief. Whether it worked or it did not work, I believe it worked. I believe it worked, because something for the past four, five years I did not revise those topics. The question dropped and I remembered.

Kwaku identifies three different strategies that he employed in his bid to pass his exams. First, he studied: "I learned hard". Second, he submitted to Christian principles and attempted to please God: "I tried to be holy ... I devoted myself ... I fasted". Third, he consulted a non-Christian spiritual practitioner, in other words, used juju: "I went to a spiritualist". At first glance this appears to be an experimental process of trial and error, discounting strategies which each represent different worldviews and moving on to new ones as each fails, until success is reached. However, there are two qualifications to this. Firstly, other conversations with and observations of the same man reveal that he has not in fact discounted any of these strategies in his approach to subsequent problems. Kwaku is among the first, on seeing children sitting with their friends in the village, to complain that they should

be studying, and he attributes low success rates in the local school to the laziness of the pupils: “they are not serious”. He continues in the Christian religion and, although at the time of the events narrated above he attended Methodist church and has since moved to AG, he explains the switch as being due to other reasons than failure to resolve his problems. In any case, the principles of holy living and fasting are preached in both churches. The strategy that finally appeared to bring results is the one he is most hesitant about repeating, although this is due to concerns over its morality rather than over its efficacy. When asked if he would repeat the same action now, he responds:

I don't know for now, I don't know. I don't know for now. But I think it might be possible. Yeah, it might be possible. Because it takes only the very strong in God to stay no matter what the situation, like Job. But probably I don't have that faith or that courage to stand against calamities or difficulties. So I may be probably compelled to do it again. But I wish I could stay like Job stayed.<sup>41</sup>

The second reason why Kwaku's use of different strategies should not be seen purely as a linear process of experimenting with alternative worldviews is that he does not completely distinguish between them on a conceptual level. Rather than three incompatible approaches, one based on secular values, another on Christian principles and the third on those of traditional religion, in Kwaku's imagination all three fit together as valid options. Thus, Kwaku sees his potential for passing his exams and the visions of which questions to study for as God-given. He attempts to live a good Christian life in order to please God so that he will be blessed with success. Moreover, even while employing herbal remedies which he is aware are not accepted by the Christian church (in this case the “spiritualist” was a *mallam*, an Islamic holy man and herbalist), he still hopes in God for their success: “I didn't come early, but let's hope God will, you know, miracles he performs”. Movement between such apparently contradictory strategies is possible precisely because they are not viewed as contradictory strategies belonging to separate and mutually exclusive discourses. Kwaku is not exploring or adopting discourses and belief systems; he is interacting with beings and processes that he knows to exist and to

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<sup>41</sup> See the book of Job in the Old Testament, where Job refuses to curse God even after severe trials including loss of his family, wealth and health. He is eventually rewarded for his faithfulness with more than he had previously possessed.

have effect. His decisions are made primarily on the experiential rather than the intellectual level and he does not necessarily feel the need for theoretical understanding: when asked whether the success of the *mallam* indicates that there is truth in Islam he simply replies, “Oh, I don’t know much about that”. As Appiah notes:

It is this belief in the plurality of invisible spiritual forces that makes possible the—to Western eyes—extraordinary spectacle of a Catholic bishop praying at a Methodist wedding in tandem with traditional royal appeal to the ancestors. For most of the participants at the wedding, God can be addressed in different styles—Methodist, Catholic, Anglican, Moslem, traditional—and the ancestors can be addressed also. Details about the exact nature of the Eucharist, about any theological issues, are unimportant: that is a theoretical question, and theory is unimportant when the practical issue is getting God on your side. After all, who needs a theory about who it is that you are talking to, if you hear a voice speak? (Appiah 1992: 135)

Indeed, the very division between theory and practice may be less than helpful in understanding Kwaku’s construction of religion. Rather than not engaging with theory, for him, ‘religion’ *is* essentially practical and could not exist—or would be pointless—in purely theoretical form. Furthermore, what Appiah does not take into account here is the constraining influence of moral frameworks on people’s actions. Just because something is known to work does not make it morally right and ethical dilemmas are universal to human beings. Moral issues are all the more pertinent when in transgressing one risks offending God, the supreme source of power, and Kwaku therefore feels a moral obligation not to consult the *mallam*. However, this is ultimately overridden by his desire to pass his exams. The determining factor again comes down to practice: although Kwaku is aware of and influenced by moral frameworks (however incoherent), in the end the spirits and forces he is interacting with are powers to be marshalled.

### ***Combining denominations***

Problems come in many shapes and sizes: people attend church in search of solutions to domestic conflict, poverty, ill-health, exams, infertility, singleness and unemployment among other things. As we have seen above, church is not the only source of help and people may explore and combine different strategies as they seek

specific blessings and protection from harm. They may also explore different churches, which compete in the market of providing answers to problems. Very few of the people interviewed claimed to have attended only one denomination of church throughout their life; the majority have switched three or more times. For some, their participation in a church depends directly on the extent to which it can meet their existential needs. Vincent, aged 20, identifies the AG as his preferred church although he currently lives in the city and does not attend meetings. He has spent time at a number of different denominations; throughout his childhood this depended on the family member he was living with at the time (with his aunt he attended Anglican church, with his mother MDCC and then Roman Catholic, and with his father Methodist), but more recently he has moved into the Pentecostal sector. Here he describes his reasons for attending Shiloh and Liberty, two Pentecostal churches in Takoradi:

V I went to this church [Shiloh] because my two brothers were also going to a church. Before they were going to Methodist, then they stopped and go to Shiloh, this church. So I was there and they came to me and said Vincent, why don't you come to our church, because the pastor is a good pastor, if you have any difficulties the pastor can help you. So I say okay.

V I went to Liberty because at that time I was having a problem. ... And this pastor was preaching at a radio, at a radio station. So I heard his voice on the radio and I think he can solve the problem for me. So I wake up in the morning, it was Wednesday, then I went to this church. When I went there they welcomed me and those ushers, those people at the church said if you are having any problem you should come. So I say okay I have some problem to discuss with them and they can help. So they called me and I just took a paper like this and they write everything that I was saying, they were writing it down. And they just give it to the pastor and they just give me a seat to sit on. I was going to this church like for prayers, prayers.

E And did they solve your problem?

V Okay, I went there and my problem was solved for sure, yeah, my problem was solved.

[...]

V I give a testimony that God has listened to my prayers, yeah, because I was in difficulty, and now I get someone who has helped me to get what I need. But the other problem was not solved. I went there with two problems. I went there for a purpose, one for my father, I want my father to come [from Nigeria], you know? And one for a friend from America who wants to help me to get a

visa to there. ... And these problems, one worked but the other one did not work. ... My father did not come. But my friend from America, he actually, I heard from him, it was a long time, I had written a lot of letters, I hadn't heard, you know? So I heard from him. By a short time everything was going. Yeah, I heard from him, everything was working then, they were making all the papers, you know? And later also I did not hear from him again. From there I stopped [attending] Liberty.

Vincent also explains his reasons for liking the AG:

V They were preaching the goodness of God, you know? And they were also teaching something from the Bible that says we should love our neighbour as ourselves, you know, we shouldn't steal, we should be a good man of our faith, you know? So this actually helped me a lot, you know?

E So you liked it

V Yeah. They give me a special place to sit, you know? Though I was young, but you know they encouraged me, they told me oh, you can come to Sunday school. So I get to know the people want me to be somebody in church. ... And also, I mean, they actually organise us and ask us, what are the problems you are facing, or is there any problem or something, tell us so that the elders there, maybe they can help you or something, you know? So we were being encouraged by the elders, and when we go from the church they shake our hands, and maybe some of them with a car they can come and drop you at the house. You see? And sometimes even they will tell you maybe you don't have a Bible or something, they can help you with a Bible. Yeah, so they were good, you know, they were doing a lot of things, I appreciate very much when I went there.

In each of these cases Vincent's attraction to the church in question is due largely to his perception of its capacity to have a positive impact on his life in terms of his existential needs. At Shiloh and the AG it is a general sense: "if you have any difficulties the pastor can help you", while he attends Liberty in search of solutions to very specific issues and, after two years, leaves the church as his problems remain unsolved. The appeal of the AG lies in its practical instruction on how to live, in the generosity of its elders and in the encouragement and recognition he receives. Membership of the church is an opportunity to move upwards in society: "the people want me to be somebody". To Vincent, then, like to Kwaku, religion is essentially practical. This is not just the case for Pentecostal churches: addressing problems is also a major motivation for attendance cited by MDCC members. The church places

strong emphasis on healing and two of its members stated successful bodily healing as their primary reason for first attending the church.

Attending church, then, can be an explicit strategy to resolve one's problems. People may select particular churches according to their reputation in providing both blessings and protection, and switch to other churches (or leave completely) if their problems remain unsolved. However, as well as switching between different churches serially, it is not uncommon for people who consider themselves members of one church to attend meetings of another church on either an irregular or a temporary basis, usually while continuing to attend their own church services as normal. I observed this several times during the period of this research: each time the extra meetings attended were prayer meetings, the motivation being to obtain prayer for a specific problem facing the individual. The reputation of certain churches (or often certain individuals within churches) as being particularly powerful in bringing about practical solutions or miracles is a key reason for movement and overlapping between churches. However, the choice of church does not depend solely on the reputation of the church in question and the perceived effectiveness of its prayers: the circumstances and relationships of the person concerned are also determining factors. Movement between churches within the Pentecostal sphere is more likely than between Pentecostal churches and African Indigenous Churches (AICs), since the former (such as the AG) generally do not recognise most AICs (such as the MDCC) as 'properly' Christian. Thus, Kwaku, an AG member who at the time of this research was seeking both a wife and a job (having been unemployed for two years), for a period of about two months attended weekly prayer meetings on Wednesday mornings at Liberty International Church, on the recommendation of a friend. Liberty is a Pentecostal church in Takoradi (the same church attended by Vincent, above): Kwaku insists, "it is all the same movement, the same Pentecostal movement".

Where people have strong relationships with others in different churches denominational boundaries may be overstepped. For example, while Abena, the sister-in-law of the MDCC pastor and who also lives in the same house as her, is a member of the Church of Pentecost, she also participates in some of the Musama meetings, usually when they involve an issue directly concerning her. So, for example, she attended the Sunday morning MDCC service on the occasion of the

church presentation of her grandson, whose mother (Abena's daughter) is an MDCC member. She also, before leaving with her daughter and grandchildren on a visit to relatives on the far side of the country, took part with the other members of the household in Musama prayers for their protection during the journey; and she participates in occasional impromptu household prayer meetings called by the pastor (usually as a response to dreams and visions) in the middle of the night. The latter two events would appear to be partly a question of submission to the authority of her sister-in-law, who is her senior in age and head of the household (being older than her brother, who is seldom at home), as well as possessing additional authority in her role as a church leader. Conversely Abena's daughter, Beth, when facing domestic difficulties regarding her boyfriend sometimes attended a weekday prayer meeting at the Church of Pentecost in Takoradi in order to obtain effective prayer. The choice of church is connected to her mother's positive experience of prayer there through which she was healed from a serious illness, leading to her enrolling as a member. Beth's position as an MDCC member did not pose any problems to her seeking additional prayer elsewhere: while the AG church does not consider most AICs as Christian, the MDCC is far broader in its recognition of other denominations. When asked about differences between churches, the pastor replied, "Put up your hand. Look at the fingers—are they all the same? God made them different. Churches are not the same, but it is one Bible".

## **Negotiating Relatedness: Relationships Within Churches**

Both the AG and the MDCC are formally opposed to the worship of "idols" and gods other than the supreme, creator God, known as *Nyame* (see Chapter 5 pp.133-134). However, they have quite different attitudes towards and relationships with local culture. The MDCC, as described earlier in the thesis, was founded on the principle of embracing local culture, and the organisation of the church was built around the social structures of the Fante people living in the Central Region of Ghana, where it originated. The founders of the church established their own township, Mozano, which is regarded not only as the headquarters of the church but also as a 'holy city', and from where outstations have been planted across the rest of the country. Antwe (1980), in his study of transformation and continuity in Akan religious ritual, compares Musama religious ritual and ceremony in Mozano with 'traditional' religion in five other towns in the same district, arguing that it represents "an account



of how a local Christian community in Gomoa has attempted to transform and deepen its roots in the Akan chiefly and priestly heritage” (Antwe 1980: 258). He goes on to suggest that “what the MDCC have done could be regarded as a conscious Christian representation of the Akan religious ritual and ceremony of the [other] five towns” (*ibid.*: 258).

Focussing on Gomoa ritual and ceremony and the annual MDCC Peace Festival Celebration, Antwe lists over twenty similarities between the two, in terms of the context of ritual and the expression of religion:

#### *Ritual context*

- Types of ritual: occasional ritual; personal ritual; periodic ritual
- Times for the rituals: annual and daily
- The use of spaces
- Tradition and history
- Devotees or participants
- Sociological perspective: emergence through social and economic deprivation; god-sent leader and hereditary leadership system
- Social cohesion and personality cult
- Communal lifestyle
- Sense of belonging

#### *Religious expressions*

- Liturgy and use of Akan lyric in worship
- Religious experts
- Religious festival
- Preliminary rites to festivals
- Principal rites to festivals
- Ritual prohibition
- Purification rites
- Materials for offertory and sacrifices
- Ceremonial meal
- Role of symbols
- Evocative clothing or regalia

- Spirit possession and healing session
- Religious language

(Antwe 1980: 293-340)

Many of these relate uniquely to the Peace Festival rather than to religious activities as practised in Ndwumizili. However, it is clear that MDCC religion closely and self-consciously mirrors Fante culture in its structure, symbolism, practices and organisation of relationships. While in the MDCC Christianity is inherently bound up with culture and the two cannot be divorced, the AG views culture purely as the context within which something that transcends culture is enacted: its mission statement concludes, “to minister to the total needs of the people within their cultural setting without compromising the statement of our fundamental truths” (Ghana Evangel 2006: 3). Pentecostalism, of which the AG is part, considers itself a transnational and universalist religion relevant to all cultures; indeed, its emphasis on mission is one of its central identifying characteristics (see César 2001). Intrinsic to this universalism is the personal nature of Pentecostal religion which, taking all people as basically similar, aims to cut through culture to reach the individual. “In its plurality, Pentecostal religiosity becomes a personal virtue, making religion ‘a characteristic of a person’... Its difference in relation to individual religiosity lies in the fact that ‘personal religiosity underlines a global interpretation of which it is also an integral part’” (Panikkar 1990 in César 2001: 37).

The emphasis on a personal relationship with God, whose power is realised through the Holy Spirit working continually and internally within each person, means that ‘ritual’ does not play a prominent role within the AG. Rites of passage such as holy communion, baptism and weddings take place, but events related to the Christian calendar are not celebrated with prescribed routines. While the MDCC conducted a series of fixed events over Easter, including a late-night Maundy Thursday vigil service and a mock burial on Good Friday, the AG marked the event with their three-day regional convention, consisting of similar activities to their normal services but on a larger scale. On Palm Sunday, the week before Easter when many churches (including the MDCC) mark Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem by parading through the village waving palm branches and singing, the AG held a normal service, during which the pastor commented:

For Pentecostals, we believe that Jesus Christ has really died for us and saved our lives already. So when we were young we used to cut palm branches [to sing] hosanna, hosanna. But do Pentecostals do this? No, because we believe that Jesus Christ has died for us already and saved our lives, and we always do hosanna because we always praise God for dying for our lives. So that is why Pentecostals at this time, we don't do hosanna with the palm branches. (AG service, 09/04/06)

However, the AG does have rituals in the broad sense of actions that are repeated regularly in the same form and for the same purpose. Sunday services, for example, not only have a fixed order of proceeding, but each element—opening prayers and singing; Bible class; praise and worship songs and prayers; testimonies (occasionally); sermon; prayers; offering(s); closing prayer—generally takes a similar format each week. The words, songs and topics vary and the focus is on spontaneous and emotional response to God, but the style and tone remain more or less the same and indeed create the conditions for this response. As De Witte observes of a larger charismatic church in Accra, “Charismatic religious practice ... presents a paradox: the performance of learned and prescribed behaviour goes together with a spontaneous experience of spiritual power (2003a: 183). The MDCC is far more self-conscious about the relationship between ritual and bodily spontaneity: as in the prayer meeting described above, ritual (singing, dancing, clapping, drumming, praying, the use of candles, oil, water and the cross) is deliberately performed in order to engage with spiritual beings.

As described in Chapter 5 (pp.147-152), the organisational structure of the MDCC reflects that of Fante society, with the Akaboha acting as the head of state. Opoku's description, repeated here, gives an indication of the amount of pomp and ceremony surrounding the Akaboha:

The *Oman* [Akan state] of Musama is headed by the Akaboha (King) who is called *Nana* [the title of all Akan chiefs] by his followers and he is every bit an Akan chief. His titles are the same as those given to Akan chiefs and he is greeted with salutations reserved for chiefs and kings. He is greatly revered, and as a sign of the reverence accorded him, sandals and footwear are removed in his presence, and women kneel in greeting him.

As a king, he never goes anywhere unaccompanied by his elders and attendants, including a linguist [counsellor, diplomat, spokesman] and an umbrella bearer. He has his own regalia,

including swords, umbrellas, palanquins, linguist staffs, gilded sandals and hats, horns and drums. The Akaboha's position as a chief is recognized by traditional chiefs in the area who invite him to their state functions and are in turn invited to attend the church's annual Peace Festival at Mozano. (Opoku 1978: 118)

This description also implies what Antwe describes as the 'personality cult' in both the MDCC and Fante culture: he observes that,

the Akaboha or the chief, as the case may be, has 'extraordinary' powers and because of the control he exercises, he is entitled to obedience, reverence or worship. The word 'entitled' I think must be emphasized, because the reason for the obeisance, reverence or worship may not be in the moral qualities of the personality or deity he represents, not in love and justice, but in the fact that, that person has 'some power' over his devotees or adherents. (Antwe 1980: 300)

This power consists in the Akaboha's perceived closeness and access to the power of God. The reverence displayed towards him extends, in diminishing levels, all the way down the ecclesiastical hierarchy so that, for example, the new young pastor at Ndwumizili is accorded great respect and deference from his church members. Like all chiefs, though, the Akaboha is not completely above all moral judgement and can be removed from office by his elders and council members. This happened for the first time in the history of the MDCC during the course of this research, when the Akaboha III was dismissed after a four-year struggle for alleged misconduct with a schoolgirl, throwing the church into turmoil and resulting in two hostile factions. As of October 2006, the end of the fieldwork period, the church was in the process of carrying out meetings to decide who would assume the role of Akaboha.

The organisation and organisational philosophy of the AG church is very different, based on that created by the American missionaries who established the church in Ghana. The head of the AG in Ghana is the General Superintendent, to whom answer six Regional Superintendents and nine Departmental Directors (for example, Women's Ministries, Sunday School and Foreign Missions). The church prides itself on its equality and democratic values: according to the General Superintendent, "[o]ur uniqueness lies in the quality of our doctrine, teaching and to a very large extent the practice of democracy in the church" (speech at 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, 26/02/06). Pastors wear suits rather than robes, and many—including

the Ndwumizili pastor—make the decision not to wear clerical collars on the basis that it distances them too much from other people. This also emerges from conversations and interviews with church members in Ndwumizili, for example:

The church basically is about the way the Bible is being taught, the Bible is taken up as a class, for general discussion where each and every one can contribute, providing you have the idea. If you don't have the idea you can also listen to people who are contributing positively. And even when you contribute, whether it's good or it's in the right direction or not, they will tell you the right thing. Or the majority decision will be decided, and therefore they will be taken up by the entire congregation. Even when you contribute negatively or which doesn't reflect on the subject matter, you are not being condemned. You are being encouraged to do so at another time. But then the right thing will be told and the entire congregation will take note of it. So it's like a Bible class without only depending on the leader or the pastor of the church, but the entire congregation's view is required. (Kwaku, responding to questioning on why he likes the AG)

Others mentioned that they appreciate the loving atmosphere, where people do not refuse to participate or carry out jobs on the basis that it is not their role: “we take it equally” (David, 54, AG member); “if I don't understand anything I can ask questions so they will explain it to me more, and everybody's contributing so I can find solutions to my problems” (Akosua, 31, female AG member).

There is, however, not complete equality within the church. Pastors (who are exclusively male, although deaconesses and some other positions may be occupied by women) and their wives are deferred to and respectfully called *Osofo* (Pastor) and *Osofo Maame* (Mother Pastor) respectively by their church members. The Ndwumizili pastor does not hesitate to rebuke and discipline his congregation, and his instructions are obediently fulfilled. Although there is also distrust and scepticism directed towards pastors, largely due to incidents and stories of fraud and misdemeanour, ‘men of God’ are widely regarded with respect and reverence. This, as Antwe notes of MDCC pastors (above), is not necessarily based on their personal qualities, but on their perceived position in relation to spiritual powers. As pastors they are considered to be endowed with high levels of spiritual wealth (see Chapter 5 pp.136-137), giving them privileged access to God. The AG pastor receives at his house a regular stream of visitors requesting prayer, including members of other churches who do not have a local ordained minister. However, official position

within the church is not all that matters, and not all church leaders are accorded the same level of respect. The preaching of the pastor was mentioned positively by several AG members, each time in relation to its relevance to their immediate circumstances: “the pastor gives us knowledge that we can apply to our lives” (Akosua, 31). A more specific example, from Adele, a 22 year old member:

I like the preaching ... I just want to listen to the word of God and apply it to my life, that's why I come to church. ... Sometimes my husband quarrels with me and there's always confusion in the house, but because I go to church and learn what the pastor says I don't get angry with my husband, I just tell the pastor and we pray for my husband and our home.

That the power of the pastor is not simply based on intellectual moral authority is clear from the demand for his prayers, but also from the way his words are perceived, as inspired directly by God: “it's like when I do something bad and I come to church, the pastor preaches about it. It's like somebody has told the pastor, but nobody has told him” (Samantha, 32, AG member). A ‘good’ pastor must therefore be able to demonstrate spiritual power and, importantly, the way this power is channelled must be relevant to people's lives in a practical sense.

On one level the MDCC and AG appear to represent two very different sectors of the Christian landscape in Ghana. The MDCC is indigenous, ritualistic, formulaic, hierarchical, communal and closely related to local (Fante) culture, while the AG is mission-initiated, individualist-oriented, informal, egalitarian and seeks to transcend culture. However, for neither church is the situation quite so clear-cut. A great deal of mainstream Christian influence is evident in the MDCC, in particular Methodism (from which the church first broke away) but also Catholicism, in the use, for example, of candles, incense and some of the ecclesiastical clothing. Moreover, the AG church, despite being founded by expatriate missionaries, operates within Ghanaian culture, in which its members remain grounded. As we have already seen, there is not a clear or strong opposition between ‘cultural’ and ‘Christian’ values; often Christianity is aligned with Ghanaian culture in opposition to Western values and practices.

## ***Family and religious bonds***

### **MDCC**

As well as mirroring the Akan state structure—and partly because of this, since Akan social structures are based on kinship ties—the MDCC also reflects the institution of the Akan family (see Jehu-Appiah 2001: 195). Indeed, the connection was made frequently and widely: the General Secretary in Mozano and the pastors and women of the Ndwumizili station alike used the words “like a family” to describe the church. The latter were referring to an environment of love and mutual assistance; the former to a strong sense of identity based on markers such as special greetings in the Musama ‘Tongue’ (see Chapter 5 p.148).

As with families, membership of the MDCC is not based primarily on either moral behaviour or belief in and acceptance of doctrine. Of course, neither is it based on blood ties; however, the structural obligations and symbols of membership—or more simply the existence of such obligations and symbols—resembles the nature of the family. As described in Chapter 4 (pp.120-122), MDCC members are required to pay two kinds of fixed contribution to the church: monthly dues (“assessment”) of ₦2,000<sup>42</sup>, entitling to them to burial by the church; and funeral contributions of ₦3,000<sup>43</sup> on the event of a death in the local circuit. This resembles the requirement within families to contribute to the needs of other family members, and in particular to the cost of funerals, which are often enormously expensive events.<sup>44</sup> The money is raised partly through contributions from individual family members during the planning stages and partly through donations received from guests (family and non-family members) during the funeral, made at a table set aside for the purpose and carefully recorded in a book. As one man expressed family membership, “you pay your dues and then if you need help we will give you something too” (Steven, late forties, ex-MDCC).

Financial rights and responsibilities are a tangible symbol of belonging, as are other markers such as the special language and jewellery used by Musama members. The

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<sup>42</sup> ₦2,000 = approx. 12p.

<sup>43</sup> ₦3,000 = approx. 18p.

<sup>44</sup> Costs include expenses of storing the body at the morgue, dressing it to lie ‘in state’ before the burial, the coffin, accommodation and entertainment such as sound systems, DJs, bands and films for the guests (which may number in the hundreds), souvenir programmes of the procedures, hire of canopies and chairs and, of course, copious amounts of food and drink.

language, known simply as ‘Tongue’, was revealed to the founder of the church by God and is employed by members not only for prayers, but also to greet one another on a routine basis. The jewellery consists of copper rings and crosses worn around the neck, manufactured at Mozano and engraved with the initials of the church. They symbolise membership of the church and invoke responsibilities of mutual assistance between members (see Chapter 7 p.212). Like families, then, membership is less about what one believes or what one does in a moral sense (although in both the family and the MDCC the latter is not completely irrelevant), and more about drawing on rights and conforming to responsibilities of the group.

## **AG**

Marshall-Fratani talks of “delocalisation of identity and community formation” (2001: 83) in the context of urban Pentecostalism in Nigeria, where “the social grounds for creating bonds—blood, common pasts, neighbourhood ties, language—are forsworn for the new bond of the brother or sister in Christ” (*ibid.*: 86). However, in Ndwumizili, even among Pentecostal Christians the ties of ethnicity, neighbourhood, culture and especially family remain strong while religious bonds are superimposed over them. Ndwumizili is, of course, in rural Ghana rather than urban Nigeria, and the rural-urban difference may be significant here, with family identity rooted in ‘the village’ while the city to some extent provides anonymity and the potential for new and multiple networks. In Ndwumizili the family remains the major source of both support and obligation, and even while AG members can situate themselves within a vast church community, stretching across the nation and beyond, this does not necessarily translate into practical terms. The precedence of family relations over church relations can be seen clearly in attitudes to hospitality, which is an important cultural value in Ghana, to the extent that Bediako claims that inhospitality towards one’s kinsmen is regarded in Africa as the most serious of all sins, comparable to murder or rape in Western culture<sup>45</sup>. Apart from hosting children of relatives for extended periods of time, it is an absolute requirement to provide family members who appear (expected or unexpected) on one’s doorstep with accommodation and food for as long as they wish to stay. Within church circles, however, obligations of hospitality towards fellow members or other Christians is a

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<sup>45</sup> Lecture: ‘Theological perspectives: continuing engagement(s) in Africa’, Akrofi Christaller Memorial Centre, Akropong, Ghana, 24/06/05.



matter of hot debate. The following is an extract from a translation of an AG Sunday school discussion, sparked off by reference to 1 Peter 4: 9: “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling”:

Anna [a deaconess] is giving a situation that some time ago she received a visitor from Takoradi, a Christian that she once met and did something good to him, so this guy came to her in Ndwumizili to give thanks for what she did to him some time ago. He came late, so he could not get a trotro [public transport] back to Takoradi or wherever he came from. So Anna gave him a room to sleep, so that the next day he could go back. Now, the next morning, very early in the morning, this guy told Anna that he really wanted to go back very early so that he could go back to work. So he departed and left. Then a few minutes later Anna realised that her cell phone in the room was missing. She could not find it, and she hasn't found the phone up to this time. Which implies that the so-called Christian brother whom she received so nicely as the Word says, finally turned into a thief and robbed her. So she says that from now onwards she will never treat any visitor as the Bible is saying. So this is a practical example she is trying to put across. Now, argument upon argument rose up in the church. Let's say for instance you are an Assembly of God member and maybe you are visiting a different town or village or city, and you don't know any person, you don't have a family member and you don't have money to lodge in a hotel. Probably at the end of your activities you couldn't get back to your place, so maybe you want to go and sleep at the Assemblies of God church, pastor's house or mission house or whatever it is. Now, Faith is making a quotation here that the Bible says that your spirit and my spirit are one. Therefore, as a true Christian, when you wake up early in the morning and you pray and you meet some of these issues, the Spirit can tell you whether that person is a true Christian or not, is a brother or not, is a sister or not. But Anna went further, saying that she believes that the Bible also says that you should apply wisdom here. So if for instance she wants to go to Accra and sleep at the AG pastor or reverend minister's house because she could not come back after whatever she did in Accra, it implies that this time around her pastor in Ndwumizili should be informed, so that when she goes to Accra and cannot come back, her pastor in Ndwumizili will telephone the pastor in Accra and inform him so that Anna should be allowed to stay. No identity, no receiving of visitors. So this is a serious issue. (AG service, 07/05/06)

Drawing on church networks is presented as a last resort, after personal acquaintances, family members and hotels. The key issue appears to be one of identification: more importance is placed on identifying a person as belonging to a group to which one is expected to show hospitality (family, church, wider Christian

community), than on determining the personal integrity of the individual. It is group membership that imposes obligation, rather than whether or not a person is trustworthy. Of course, recognised membership of a group implies a certain level of trustworthiness due to the implications of transgressing the norms of the group for the transgressor. Family members who deceive or steal from their relatives risk incurring not only reproach but also the withdrawal of support and resources from the wider family. Likewise, people in the AG church who misbehave towards their fellow members are likely to face disciplinary measures, including possible expulsion from the church. There is, however, a crucial difference between family and church. Membership of a family is fixed and easily ascertainable: it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to hide or to disguise one's identity within a family, or to leave one family and join another. Church membership is far more fluid: identity as a member of a church is less easily verifiable; one can enter and exit a particular denomination at will; and the repercussions of misdemeanour are far less harsh, as even expulsion from one church does not prevent entry into another. In both church and family trust only appears to reach to a certain point: witchcraft discourses are commonly drawn on precisely because they refer to what is—or, more pertinently, what *may* be—done in secret and is thus not controlled by recognised group behavioural codes.

The AG church recognises the importance of the family and does not impose authority in all areas of life: some things are left to traditional powers, for example in the case of a male member who wished to withdraw his financial support for the education of a young man (not an AG member) who had been misusing the money. Although he consulted the pastor, the affair was settled through a meeting between senior members of both families: the pastor was not involved, considering it a family affair.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, funerals of AG members are usually left to the family to conduct, as is customary in Ghanaian society, with the church's participation consisting of a thanksgiving service alongside the traditional funeral celebrations.

The sense of fluidity, uncertainty and fear of the unknown echoes of portrayals of modernity as dislocating, unsettling, uncontrollable, unstable and transient (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993a; Marshall-Fratani 2001). However, while Marshall-Fratani finds

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<sup>46</sup> If both parties had been AG members the pastor may have taken a more active role; however, it is unlikely that the family would have been excluded.

that Pentecostalism “responds to and helps resolve the fear and uncertainty which have come to mark social relations” by offering “an overarching sense of belonging and common purpose” (2001: 85), here we see the church as part of the uncertainty, introducing new, insecure connections with high risks of abuse, deception and betrayal. The institution of the family may also be undermined by modern insecurities, manifested particularly in the growing numbers of witchcraft accusations; however, family ties remain stronger than those of the church.

## **Conclusion**

When considered in the context of everyday life, it is clear that boundaries between ‘religions’—either religious traditions such as, in this case, Christianity and traditional religion, or different denominations within Christianity—are not fixed. Although when asked about church connections people normally give a single denomination with which they identify, setting this in historical perspective reveals a more complex situation. Church identity is fluid and people are likely to attend different churches simultaneously in order to benefit from perceived strengths, as well as switching between denominations in a linear fashion for a variety of reasons. Relationships are crucial to the process of movement between churches, both in providing introductions and for those seeking to be part of a community. Sometimes entry to or exit from churches is by the coercion of others, the former usually by family members and the latter by church leaders as a disciplinary measure against non-compliance with behavioural codes. Where people have choice in selecting which church, if any, to attend, the most common motivating factor is the search for solutions to problems: viewed as providing access to the power of God, participation in church is commonly used as a strategy to address difficult issues in one’s life, to seek blessings (including the removal of ills) and to protect from harm (including a lack of progress). Not all churches, however, are perceived as equally capable of delivering answers and some acquire a reputation for particularly effective prayer. People therefore move between churches and denominations to achieve maximum benefit to their lives: within the Christian landscape as well as on a broader scale, they seek to address their problems where they perceive power to lie.

While there is often assumed to be an inherent connection between Ghanaian ‘culture’ and traditional religion, the two are not synonymous. Both the AG and MDC churches claim to oppose traditional religious practices, but neither rejects ‘culture’ *per se*; indeed both applaud many cultural values in contrast to the immorality they see as being introduced to their society by modernity. There are, however, major differences between the ways that each of these churches relates to culture. The MDCC is founded upon and organised to mirror local (Fante) cultural structures: as an indigenous church it has no externally defined cosmology to subscribe to and therefore has more scope for adaptation and self-definition as well as acceptance of other, different churches. The AG, on the other hand, sees itself as part of a global movement that transcends any specific culture: it looks outside itself to the world-wide Pentecostal community for its referents, which are considered universal, and is therefore less flexible in its doctrines and principles. The differences are evident in both practices and relationships within the churches, with the MDCC’s rituals and hierarchical structure reflecting that of Fante society, while the AG has a more democratic framework, placing emphasis on the individual’s personal relationship with God. However, despite the AG representing a new, international community and claiming to offer liberation from ties with other human or spiritual powers, and despite the MDCC creating its own systems of authority paralleling local structures, neither church entirely replaces or eliminates the influence of existing social structures and powers. The family remains the nexus of rights and responsibilities, where the strongest and most compelling bonds are found. Moreover, spiritual powers other than *Nyame* also remain on the landscape and in addressing their problems—protecting themselves from harm and seeking blessings—people appear to interact with these largely on a pragmatic basis, constrained more by moral and practical than epistemological considerations.

## **Marshalling the Powers: Continuities between ‘Religious’ and ‘Non-Religious’**

### **Introduction**

The second division often assumed by social science analyses of Christianity in Africa is the separation of ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’. In Chapters 2 (pp.46-47) and 5 (pp.169-170) it was argued that ‘religion’ (and, therefore, ‘non-religion’) is a category that needs some interrogation. While it is clearly important to Ghanaian society and not separated out from public life and confined to the private realm, neither should it be viewed as the underlying, self-conscious basis of people’s understanding of the whole world. If the existence of a range of spiritual (and other) powers is undoubted, then interaction with them becomes less a matter of religion than of pragmatism. In this chapter the blurred boundaries between the ‘religious’ and the ‘non-religious’ and the appropriateness of these terms are explored in relation to how problems are approached by members of the MDCC and the AG, and to how they negotiate relatedness.

### **Approaches to Problems**

#### ***Healthcare strategies***

As we have seen in Chapter 2 (pp.42-43), Gifford (1994, 2004a, 2004b) argues that the new charismatic churches in urban centres privilege spiritual over structural or scientific causes and explanations of problems, thereby encouraging people to spend, for example, hours and days at meetings praying for wealth instead of working, or to forsake medical treatment for divine healing. This, however, does not seem to be the case in either of the churches in this study. The AG church runs two hospitals in the north of Ghana and includes medical outreach as part of its mission statement of “minister[ing] to the total needs of the people” (Ghana Evangel 2006: 3), combining

prayer and medical treatment rather than substituting the former for the latter. This is reflected in the approaches of AG members to illness, as illustrated in the following testimony given by a female teacher during a church service:

Last Friday was my daughter's second birthday. That evening at six o'clock I was in the kitchen preparing supper and something struck me to go into the house. I went there and found the child with a bottle of kerosene that I had hidden somewhere—she had taken the kerosene to rub all over her body and I suspected that she might have drunk some. So I rushed her to the hospital and she was given some medicine and vomited everything up. I want to thank God for saving my daughter. (Natasha, AG service, 14/05/06)

Here, God is given overall credit for the protection and recovery of the child, both alerting her mother to the danger and working through hospital staff to treat her. However, at the same time medical treatment is considered essential for resolving what is interpreted as a medical issue. Two levels of operation can therefore be identified: while God has ultimate control over everything and can intervene as desired, other systems work within those parameters and must be complied with. Prayer is thus an ongoing essential in all areas of life, but it does not preclude the necessity also to interpret and approach problems in non-religious terms. The quality of being 'religious' or 'non-religious' is itself not distinguished: there is no sense that in turning to 'secular' medicine people are any less seeking help from God; rather that medicine acts as a medium through which God's power is manifested. This notion is not, of course, unique to this particular church or to Ghana. It can be found both in other societies (including developed countries) and in other religions. Marcia Inhorn, studying infertility in Egypt among both Coptic Christians and Muslims, observes:

There, highly educated, middle- to upper-class Egyptians are also keen to try the latest infertility technologies, but most do so under the firm conviction that God has made them infertile for good reasons that only He can know; that He expects them to seek treatment to overcome their infertility; and that the new technologies He has created to overcome infertility are firmly under His control. Thus, God ultimately decides whether or not these technologies will succeed in any given case, and His reasons for success or failure must not be questioned. Ultimate outcomes are simply "in God's hands," and Muslims who are faithful realize that they "do what they can," leaving "the rest up to God." (Inhorn 2003: 102)

There is thus a limit to the extent to which human beings can control their own lives: they cannot escape from being subject to God's will, and it is God who has power over all events and situations. However, people are not entirely helpless. They can—and are expected to—act both to realise the will of God, for example through seeking appropriate medical care, and to some extent to influence the will of God, through prayer, fasting and holy living: in effect, putting themselves in a position to be blessed.

According to Antwe (1980) and Baëta (1962), MDCC members may not consult either Western-trained doctors or African herbalists, “are not allowed the use of any drugs whatsoever, and may be treated in the hospital only for accidents involving some abrupt break of a bodily organ” (Baëta 1962: 54). Although divine healing remains one of the key concerns of the church, this is no longer to the exclusion of other forms of medicine—indeed, the female Ndwumizili pastor is a trained nurse and runs the village pharmacy. She is visited by people with all kinds of health issues and her treatments include ‘modern’ tablets and injections and advice on diet and lifestyle as well as prayer and religious (specifically Musama) rituals. Prayer is not always an intrinsic or necessary component of her treatments: her most common prescriptions include drugs such as chloroquin, paracetamol, imodium and vitamin supplements, and she frequently refers cases beyond her scope to a hospital in one of the neighbouring towns. On occasion she will launch into a tirade against people who do not seek appropriate medical attention, for example when a member of her church whose baby was burned in a fire waited four days for the pastor to return from travelling instead of taking him to hospital. The reason for the delay was not about preferences between particular types of medical approaches or remedies, but money: hospital visits must be paid for, while the pastor can be persuaded to give treatment on credit. Thus, as in the AG church, ‘modern’ medical science is not rejected, while religious practices are also employed.

The key difference between the churches' approach to health issues can be identified at the level of practice. In the AG, prayers are noisy and emotional. With the exception of those that have a specific function such as opening and closing a service or praying over an offering, prayer is practised simultaneously and aloud by the entire congregation. Topics of prayer are directed by a leader while the congregation

stands, bodies moving restlessly, hands and faces often raised. During prayers of thanksgiving and worship emotions run high and people may weep, kneel or prostrate themselves on the unfinished concrete floor of the church building. During evening prayer meetings, when there are generally fewer people and fewer chairs, members roam the room while praying (both worship and intercession), each finding his/her individual space. The tone is fervent and forceful with a great deal of emphasis and repetition of key phrases (“*Je-sus! Je-sus! Je-sus!*”). The AG does not support the idea of rituals and the style and practice of prayer is not pre-determined according to specific circumstances. Although this allows flexibility in the manner in which prayer is carried out, it also encourages uniformity, with no distinction between different issues and situations: most problems are dealt with in the same way. Typically, when prayer is requested or if the pastor becomes aware of a problem (whether financial issues, domestic strife or illness), he will sit or stand with the person concerned and pray in the same forceful tones, often placing his hand on their head or shoulder while he invokes the power of the blood of Jesus to defeat the plans of the devil. Church members are expected to engage in ‘non-religious’ strategies to resolve their problem, such as visiting a doctor and, while they are repeatedly urged to pray constantly, the emphasis is on the individual crying out personally to God.

The MDCC, on the other hand, has a complex system of prayers and rituals applicable to specific events and circumstances. Musama life is organised around a series of fixed prayers, set out in various church publications such as *The Musama Book of Rituals* (Jehu-Appiah n.d.). Church services follow a set liturgical structure. Fixed prayers dictate the proceedings of organised events that take place within the church, such as baby ‘outdoorings’, but also events which take place outside the church, either regularly, such as praying before meals, or irregularly, such as receiving a stranger or facing danger. In addition to this standard liturgy, there is room for creativity and discretion on the part of the Akaboha (the head of the church) and pastors in dealing with issues presented to them. This is usually in the form of ‘system’ prayers, prescribed *ad hoc* by the head of the church in response to the circumstances of individual members. As Baëta describes it, “the ‘system’ might require a member to recite a certain prayer at certain places so many times a day while holding a palm branch in the right hand, or dressed completely in white, or standing before three lighted candles, etc.” (1962: 52). Local pastors also have



discretion in prescribing rituals for members of their congregations, but the members themselves are simply expected to obey. The following is an account of a Musama prayer meeting called by the new (male) local pastor. It is a warm October night with an intensely bright full moon. The prayers take place at the house of the former (female) pastor who is now promoted to district level, which was until recently the venue for all church meetings and is still the location of the symbol of the church, a white wooden cross, six feet tall and bearing the letters MDCC painted crudely in red.

A little before 11pm about fifty people, as usual almost all women, pour into the courtyard around the cross. Drumming, singing, clapping, dancing. It's a beautiful sound, but the voices are neither fragile nor delicate; the beauty is in their energy and strength. Five women hold candles. The pastor starts praying for people, pressing their forehead until they writhe under his hand, surrounded by the continuously moving bodies of the crowd, dancing hard to the beat of the drums. From above it looks like complete chaos. One woman—an elder—seems to be praying for pregnant women—a couple of others hold up a cloth as a screen around each woman in turn as she lifts her dress for the elder to massage her belly vigorously. As I watch, the district pastor appears at my side. She stands frozen for a few seconds, her body and face tense and alert, gazing down at the scene below. She doesn't say anything, doesn't acknowledge my presence, then runs back to her room to get dressed, reeling slightly as she goes. A little later she appears again in her white dress and headscarf, and goes down to join the people in the courtyard. She now becomes the focus of the tumult. One by one, amidst the commotion, people kneel before her for prayer. Her actions are authoritative, urgent and not gentle. She doesn't pray in the same way for each one. Sometimes she sprinkles water (to which Florida water or oil has been added) on them, or around their head in a circle. She also throws water over the general crowd, and there are women running up and down the stairs for more. Sometimes she touches the cross, wipes their face roughly with her hand and then makes brushing movements on each shoulder and forcefully rubs the neck, shoulders and chest. Or she takes a candle and runs around them in a circle three or four times. One lady she takes by the hand and makes her run around the cross, first one direction and then the other. For another, she gets five women to gather round and place their hands on her head, praying and calling the angel Michael. Sometimes she pulls a woman to embrace her, then pushes her away, then embraces her again three times. Once she takes a Bible, seems to flick through it distractedly and then closes it and beats it lightly against the woman's head and shoulders. The drumming, singing, dancing, clapping continue ceaselessly.

Some of the women go crazy when she prays for them, jumping up, writhing, convulsing, having to be restrained by several others. Sometimes they have babies on their backs, and other women remove them before they get hurt. Several women seem to convulse spontaneously, running around wildly. One girl in particular goes into a complete frenzy, lashing out, fighting, kicking at the pastor and then escaping from those restraining her to run like a whirlwind through the crowd, only to be grabbed and held down again. Sometimes the pastor herself staggers and reels, and nobody goes to support her, they just make way and give her space. She has certain assistants—one lady holds a bowl of water and candles (like a surgeon's assistant), and every time she prays for someone the pastor says something in Araba's ear. Araba doesn't immediately act on what she hears, just nods and turns to assist with the next one. [Araba is a member of a special MDCC prayer group (*Nahatan*) and is therefore instructed on the specific kinds of prayers have been prescribed for each member.]

The district pastor also prays for pregnant women and those hoping for children as the elder had done. Eventually, when it seems that all the adults have been dealt with, children are brought. She stands before the cross and takes each one in turn. Each time her actions are slightly different. Babies she places her hand on and then holds them out before the cross, touching their bodies against it high and low a few times. Children she makes stand on the base of the cross, pressed against the wood with their arms around it.

During most of this, from the time that the district pastor took over, the male pastor stands motionless, hands clasped around his Bible. Sometimes he too prays for people, or goes to tell the singing band to continue to sing. (Journal, 17/10/06; see Pictures 7.1 and 7.2 below)

The hierarchical nature of the MDCC is clear: knowledge is esoteric and leaders—those in possession of such knowledge and the power it brings—are revered. Moreover, this account demonstrates the potential for creativity and adaptability on the part of the pastor (in this case the district pastor; at other times, when she is not there, the local pastor). It is she, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who identifies the needs of each person thrust before her and prescribes individually-tailored treatments. In meetings such as this, these treatments all take the form of religious ritual: there are no questions regarding symptoms, no temperatures are taken, no tablets are dispensed. However, outside of such meetings, some of the same people may visit the same 'expert' regarding the same condition (where it is health-related), and be prescribed biomedical treatments. Beth, for example, gave birth to her son before the prayer meeting described above, but participated in others like it during her pregnancy. In the latter stages of the pregnancy she also met regularly with the

female pastor and an elder for liturgical prayer, including physical massage. Simultaneously, in her capacity as nurse, the pastor advised her on health issues related to her pregnancy and prescribed biomedical treatments such as vitamin, iron and folic acid tablets.

MDCC prayers therefore tend to form part of a larger therapy programme which may include the use of 'modern' medicines. Or, to put it the other way around, 'modern' medicines (as well as local herbal remedies) are seen as part of a wider range of treatments, including religious rituals, to be used as appropriate according to the diagnosis. Musama prayers are more specifically directed and designed than AG prayers, but in neither church is there any sense of conflict or contradiction between the power of prayer and the power of medicine.

**Picture 7.1: MDCC prayers: the female pastor holds out a baby to the cross (the male pastor stands robed in white in the background).**



**Picture 7.2: MDCC prayers: the female pastor and elders pray for a young woman, placing their hands on her head as she kneels.**



## **Money**

A Spanish photo-journalist travelling through Ndwumizili told me excitedly about a man he had met who was growing and distilling citronella in the village and also building a sizeable house. However, he became disapproving when I told him that this was one of the leaders of a church in the village. The positive entrepreneurship became negative greed when the person accumulating money was a church leader. Money and religion sit uneasily together: money is usually associated with the profane, the material and the transactional, while religion is linked with the sacred, the spiritual and the sacrificial. Bloch and Parry argue that “*for us* [in the Western world] money signifies a sphere of ‘economic’ relationships which are inherently impersonal, transitory, amoral and calculating” (Bloch & Parry 1989: 9), and that this construct is often inappropriately imposed onto other societies.

In Ghana there is an ongoing media debate over the place of money in church. On the one hand there are regular reports of scandals involving ‘fake’ pastors who defraud innocent members of the public out of enormous sums of money by charging them for prayer and miracles.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand is the pervasive ‘prosperity gospel’ taught with sincerity in many churches, which asserts that one’s health and wealth are directly proportionate to one’s faith, and that the more one gives to God (via the church), the more one will receive. This often results in extremely rich church leaders (particularly of the mega-churches in Accra), inciting resentment and cynicism from the media and the public. It is not just independent pastors that come in for criticism; leaders of established denominations such as the Catholic and Methodist churches are also criticised for their relative wealth. The pastors of the MDC and AG churches in this study both receive their income directly from church offerings. However, neither one is wealthy. The AG pastor relies on his wife’s teacher’s salary and living accommodation, and the MDCC pastor lives off earnings from her guest house and pharmacy. In reality both appear to contribute more financially to their respective churches than they receive: the MDCC pastor has funded the majority of the ongoing church building project from her private income, while the AG pastor and his wife have paid for their church’s plastic chairs. Both

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<sup>47</sup> For example, ‘Check fake and illegal churches’, *Mirror*, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2006; ‘Pastor steals musician’s money’, *Spectator* (2007).

pastors also receive frequent requests for financial and material assistance from needy members of their congregations and sometimes from others outside the church. It is not surprising that, while leaders of larger churches in urban centres can benefit enormously from such a system of remuneration, rural pastors whose congregations are mostly very small and very poor struggle to find the means to make ends meet.

It is clear that money plays a large role in churches. We saw in Chapter 4 (pp.120-122; 125-126) that at a typical service in either the MDCC or the AG one can expect at least two offerings, plus announcements, exhortations and discussions on issues of church finances and contributions from members. In practice, of course, it is not easy to raise large amounts of money from poor congregations. A multiplicity of demands results in less being contributed per offering or, where sums are fixed, payments are deferred and people participate, in effect, on credit. During MDCC services the pastor occasionally gives an account to the congregation of the church finances, reading out names of those who have failed to pay their dues for several months. However, despite regular warnings it is rare for members to be expelled from church for defaulting on financial contributions. More common in both churches is self-exclusion, where members do not attend church because of the knowledge that they cannot contribute to offerings. Excessive financial demand is the most common reason given for leaving or not attending church, covering virtually all denominations. For some this is related to their own image in society and the experience or fear of being judged and gossiped about when seen not to give appropriate amounts. Although the 'naming and shaming' effect of public accounting does not happen in the AG, in both churches offerings are carried out in a very public manner so that it is easy to feel self-conscious about the amount one gives. It is also linked to a sense of disillusionment and cynicism towards the church, particularly where pastors are perceived as accumulating wealth from the efforts of their congregations. "Every week you have to give money, offering, offering, and then you go build a big house, and a poor man like me, I can't build a house but I have to give" (Kwame, ex-MDCC but speaking of churches in general).

However, a wealthy church attracts as well as repels, offering both useful social connections and promises of success. Prosperity implies power: the wealthier the pastor, the greater access to power they are perceived to have (see Marshall 1991:

27-8)—although precisely which power they obtain their wealth through is not always clear. Moreover, in all churches in the village, including the AG and the MDCC, giving money is presented as part of a solution to problems: it is through giving to God that one is blessed (see Chapter 5 p.155,163). Attending church may add to people's problems, but it is also seen as a potential way out of them. If monetary demands are the biggest cause of not attending church, the most commonly cited reason for attending (after family influence) is to find a solution to one's problems. These problems very often relate to poverty, thus their solutions are financial. Blessings come (or are desired) in the form of money. In the context of church, then, the relationship between money and problems is ambivalent, being both a contributory factor (through giving), and a potential solution (through receiving)—and giving is often presented as the prerequisite for receiving. From both perspectives, however, money and religion are very closely associated. Churches do not conceal their demands for financial gifts and money is an integral part of church services, in the offerings, in the administrative 'announcements' and in prayers and teaching relating to holy living and receiving blessings. In the light of the previous two chapters, this should not be surprising. Rather than a focus on money in churches being seen with cynicism as reductionist, if religion is essentially practical it would be illogical if it were not intrinsically tied up with the most pressing day-to-day concerns, of which money—especially in a context of poverty—is certainly one.

## **Negotiating Relatedness: The Interdependence of Social and Spiritual Relationships**

The account of the MDCC prayer meeting given above illustrates the intense bodily nature of Musama worship. Practice is privileged over intellect: everything takes place in the realm of the senses, with intensely physical singing, dancing, clapping and drumming and tangible symbols—fire, water, the cross, the Bible—that are physically touched. The second overwhelming characteristic of such rituals is the centrality of corporate participation: the individual's experience of and relationship with God is greatly enhanced through other people, both the pastor and the group. Jehu-Appiah, writing on AICs in London, argues that:

whereas in the European churches spirituality is generally described in terms of individual growth (even though the corporate basis and dimension is not ignored), in the African Indigenous Churches, spirituality is primarily a corporate affair. This stems from the nature of the communal and all-involving organisation of those churches. The free-flowing nature of their liturgy, the participation of all members, the facilitation of congregational prayer for mutual growth and support, the recounting of spiritual and religious experiences, the centrality of praise and thanksgiving, are all corporate activities. The individual experience derives from the corporate experience, and it is in the context of the corporate experience that the individual experience is evaluated. (Jehu-Appiah 2001: 282).

Collective worship is also important in the AG church: Bible studies consist of group discussions rather than individual reflections; singing, dancing and praying are all performed corporately. It is during these times of collective worship that emotion mounts, whether expressed in smiles and joyful outbursts of dance and song, or tears, kneeling and reverent songs of awe. While the emphasis is on each individual's relationship with God, this relationship is formed and consolidated within the context of the group.

The individual's relationship with God is therefore dependent to some extent on their relatedness to other people. The social and the spiritual are not entirely separate, but interdependent. Corporate worship is not the only context in which this occurs; relationships with spirits are also influenced through the mediation of 'experts' and through moral frameworks, which are manifest largely in relationships with other human beings.

### ***Dependence of the spiritual on the social***

Certain members of society, as we have seen in Chapter 5 (pp.136-137), are attributed high levels of spiritual wealth and, therefore, the capacity to influence and manipulate spiritual power to a greater extent than 'ordinary' people. While spirits can play a role in human society, social (human) actors can also intervene and have authority amongst spirits. Priests and priestesses act as intermediaries between gods and humans; chiefs and elders perform a similar role with regard to ancestors. *Nsinli* and *mallams* employ herbs and plants to exploit spiritual power; witches use their own power to attack their victims. As discussed in Chapter 6 (pp.188-191), pastors



and prophets or prophetesses are regarded as having special access to spirits (in particular but not exclusively to God), through prayer, ritual and divine revelation. Here the focus is on the interdependence of the social and the spiritual in people's everyday relationships.

Social relationships are shaped largely in terms of how people represent themselves to others, making conscious or unconscious statements about aspects of their identity in the way they dress, speak and act and in the groups with which they associate themselves. Such representations are informed by the way in which people perceive the world, including their awareness of spiritual powers: they are interpreted and responded to by both humans and spirits.

## **Dress**

One of the most easily observable aspects of how people present themselves in society is dress. Walking around the village one sees men in old shorts or trousers and T-shirts, and women wearing lengths of cloth wrapped carelessly around them or second-hand Western-style skirts and tops. Children wear similar clothes, often cotton shift dresses for girls, and sometimes nothing but a pair of underpants and perhaps a T-shirt. Flip-flops are standard footwear. Against this backdrop of dressed-down informality however, others stand out: men wearing Western-style suits, shirts cut from African prints, or traditional cloth wrapped around the body and over one shoulder; women in heels and tailored three-piece Ghanaian outfits or smart dresses, skirts and blouses; children in yellow and brown school uniforms or new jeans and shoes. There are four main reasons why people should dress up like this. First, they may be going to an office (or to school), either to visit, conduct business or to work. Apart from the school and the GILLBT Bible translation office, the only places of work in Ndwumizili requiring smart dress are the hotels which, like other medium and large businesses, usually prescribe their own uniform. In offices in the city Western-style work-wear is usually adopted, although in November 2004 the government introduced a regulation that civil servants wear Ghanaian styles every Friday, as part of a campaign to promote national culture. Second, well-dressed people may be attending a social or religious event, for instance a church meeting or a funeral (the latter are usually identifiable by the colour of clothing: red (or variations thereof) or black, with black headscarves worn by women). For both these

types of occasion, especially ‘cultural’ events such as rites of passage, Ghanaian-style outfits are usually preferred, although men are more likely than women to opt for Western-style clothes. Third, styles of clothing may reflect age or status: the chief in Ndwumizili consistently wears Ghanaian cloth in traditional style, which is also far more commonly worn among older than younger men. Finally, people dressed smartly in the village are likely to be either non-residents visiting Ndwumizili, or residents on their way to or from somewhere else. Ghanaians dress up to travel, whether their destination is the other side of the world, the capital city or a neighbouring village. In fact, the destination itself is not always important: the defining factor is simply that one is outside one’s home environment, so just as villagers dress up to travel to the city, so also do city-dwellers dress up to visit the village.

Clothing can thus symbolise membership of or distance from a particular group. In Ghana there is a strong culture of ‘uniform’, simply meaning standardised dress worn by all members of a group. Even very small businesses are likely to adopt uniforms for their staff, usually consisting of a specially designed or selected cloth which each employee has sewn into their preferred style: dresses or blouses for women and shirts for men. Larger companies or organisations incorporate their name or logo into the fabric design, and some host fashion shows to launch new uniforms, modelled by members of staff. Such dress-codes are not viewed as impositions by authority; rather, people are invariably happy to wear uniforms, and women in particular enjoy spending time discussing the styles they will have their cloth made into. In a society where solidarity and communality are fundamentally important, demonstrating membership of a group is something to take pride in. This is all the more the case when work is scarce and the ‘group’ is an employer: membership then represents success and enhances status.

Churches adopt similar dress practices when celebrating significant occasions: special cloth is printed, along with T-shirts, baseball caps and headscarves bearing the logo of the church and the event which they mark, for example the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the AG in Ghana in 2006 (see Pictures 5.9, 5.10, 5.12 in Chapter 5). These are available to be bought by church members and worn at the celebratory and subsequent events, the cloth being tailored according to the taste of the individual, usually into three-piece suits for women and shirts for men. Wearing the right clothes

is important: most AG members in Ndwumizili could not afford the anniversary T-shirt and cap and therefore did not attend the regional celebrations, which consisted of dancing and speeches following a parade through Takoradi city centre. Outside one's home environment, where the individual is known personally, the sense of being part of the collective is thus very much tied up in external representations: it is important to wear the right clothes in order to demonstrate one's identification with the church—both to fellow members from other localities and to non-members.

Membership of the MDCC is also signified by clothing. This is to a large extent hierarchical, with female pastors, prophetesses, elders and choristers dressing in white dresses and headscarves at services while their male counterparts wear white or cream robes. At local services female members of the congregation (few men attend) wear white headscarves. However, the primary identifying symbol of the MDCC is jewellery. There are two distinctive items in everyday use by Musama members (including babies and children) both made from copper at the headquarters of the church and engraved with the initials 'MDCC': a cross worn as a pendant around the neck and a ring. These serve as forms of identification, allowing others to recognise their fellow church members and compelling them to offer help in times of need: "like Lodge members, if one is in court and you too are a member, you have to help him" (female pastor, MDCC). In fact, Musama crosses are not only worn by MDCC members, partly because of their second function as protective devices against evil spirits. Some parents outside the church put the cross on their small children because "when you are very young it is easy for devils to come and attack you, make you sick, give you disease" (Luke, ex-MDCC).

Musama jewellery is thus directly recognised by and imperative to both humans and spirits. It invokes specific rights and obligations within the MDCC community and denies evil spirits the power to harm the wearer, through symbolising protection by the greater power of Jesus. While the clothes people wear to identify themselves with churches (or with other groups) are not considered to hold such intrinsic spiritual power in themselves, they are also meaningful in both spiritual and social terms, through the associations they symbolise.

## **Moral behaviour**

Belonging to a church can enhance one's perceived spiritual wealth (and thus one's status) in multiple ways. It can indicate alliance with and access to God: as Paul, a member of the Methodist church put it, "they say this boy, he's a man of God. Don't tell him any shit". It can provide opportunities for personal development and leadership:

If you are serious with God, you can learn better, you learn better for yourself. I can be proud of myself, so I can say that if today I can stand in front of a congregation and preach and make people happy, it's [because of] Assemblies of God. (Anna, AG deaconess)

Association with a church also affects one's moral reputation. It may be beneficial:

When I come out of the church, or walking in the church, everybody will see that I'm a Christian, like from the way I am, my lifestyle and everything. That is the benefit of the church. (Sandra, MDCC)

However, it may also be detrimental. People talking about their dislikes of church often refer to the behaviour of church-goers:

Yeah, people like, someone would like to go to Methodist, but when they see some people who are in the Methodist, maybe their behaviour is not good for them. And maybe they like insulting other people ... when they see them they don't greet them. ... So for that matter, no, people don't like to go to church. (Vincent, ex-AG)

Where church members are considered to behave badly, there may be a fear of judgement through association, by people outside the church:

Because you will go and meet people over there [at church]. And when you reach them their behaviour is not good. And you don't like it, because you don't want anyone to mention your name, call you a bad person or something, oh you are not good. (Luke, ex-MDCC, ex-AG)

On the other hand, churches are also concerned about the impact of the behaviour of their members on *their* reputation. The example below of a warning delivered by the AG pastor to his congregation is not uncommon:

The world realises that God's house is the house of blessing and mercies, and God will lead us to work in this way and every good way, and not anyhow. ... You hear very bad news from Christians, from their behaviour. And after church service or any time you shall be going in town, and then you hear something about some of the Christians or church members, like a church member or Christian may have his wife at home and then be going out with the girlfriend. It's very furious and very disturbing. Yes, as a Christian, you're going out with your girlfriend - is that the will of God? As a Christian you consult other gods. Is that the will of God? Sometimes even they don't go themselves, but they tell other people to go and consult small gods. Is that the will of God? As a Christian or a church elder, you tell people to go and consult small gods, as they call it. The same people will come back and spread the news that it is the church elder or Christian who [goes] to go such a place. Look at the disgrace. Look at the harm which such a statement will cause to the Christian community. ... And I don't want to hear anything bad, any bad stories about any of the members. For whoever I hear any bad stories about, I will call them and sanction or punish them. ... In our neighbouring village there was this young lady student who got impregnated, and after having given birth decided to attend a different church. Then I said hallelujah, it's good that she has attended a different church. And she went, after delivering, she attended that church for six months and later came back to Assemblies of God, my church, again. This time around I called the lady and the mother and talked to them, that the way the lady got impregnated and gave birth wasn't a good sign to the church. So I talked to them as the way the pastor should talk to them, and suspended her, and they all understood me. So me, if I should hear any bad news ever, about any church member, that is the discipline. The discipline that you deserve will surely come to you from me. So, please, we are in a small community, and you should try as much as you can to comport yourself and behave like Christians, otherwise the discipline will come to every member whom I catch wayward. ... Now, after that special service some few weeks back, people are really praising God and recommending the church. Therefore, if any member of this church should do anything bad in the community and it comes to bear, then the church is disgraced and God is also disgraced. So please, try to comport yourselves and never disgrace the church and God. Amen. I want the name of this church to be mentioned in the community as a good church. (Pastor, AG service, 12/03/06)

Partly to protect their own image, churches impose on their congregations behavioural codes and constraints, to various degrees of rigour dependent on their

interpretation of biblical teachings. The SDA church, for example, takes a literal view of the Bible and expects its members to follow a range of rules relating to what they eat (no shellfish or strangled meat, for instance), drink (no coffee or Coca Cola) and wear (no earrings). The AG, along with most other Pentecostal churches, has fewer specific rules; however, alcohol and smoking are prohibited, as well as pre- or extra-marital sex, polygamy and any practice of juju or traditional religion. The MDCC, on the other hand, like other 'spiritual' churches, has a different regulatory system. The local MDCC leaders do not show the same concern for the reputation of their church as do the AG leaders. When behaviour is mentioned in services (as it often is), it is in relation to one's relationship with God (and the acquisition of blessings) or with others within the church. The MDCC also appears to be more lenient in its approach to church discipline than Pentecostal churches like the AG. While pre-marital sex, for instance, is officially prohibited, unmarried women are not sanctioned or suspended for becoming pregnant. Membership is based less on moral conduct and the individual's relationship with God, and more on fulfilling financial obligations of monthly dues (see Chapter 4 p.120), and symbolic markers of identity such as wearing Musama jewellery and learning greetings in the Musama 'Tongue' (see Chapters 5 (p.148) and 6 (pp.192-193)). On the other hand, the MDCC enforces many more regulations in terms of church rituals and practices (for example, the wearing of MDCC jewellery and the use of candles, incense and water), as it is through these practices as well as through moral behaviour that one's relationship with God is established and consolidated.

The fear of being tainted by the actions of others is also apparent in other contexts. In Chapter 5 (p.141) reference was made to a woman rebuking her fourteen year old granddaughter for failing to make the most of an opportunity to be educated by expatriates in Accra. Her reproaches also included complaints she had received about the girl from visitors to the household, such as not showing respect by giving way to an older man on the stairs, and throwing away food that had been given to her. The woman's main issue with the girl's behaviour was that she herself was being disgraced by it, her good reputation as a guest house proprietor and the respect she received from the community being brought down: "I have worked hard to build up all this – I will not allow you [the granddaughter] to destroy it". Not only, then, is image in the eyes of the community extremely important, constituting the basis of one's social status, but it is strongly linked to membership of certain groups or

association with certain people, and *their* image. This in turn, where the group is a church or other religious organisation, is connected with the image of the spirits with which it is associated, notably *Nyame* (God: see Chapter 5 pp.133-134). One's relationship with God, then, is inescapably bound up with one's relatedness with other people.

Behavioural constraints and regulations in churches do not only exist to protect the reputation of the church: their primary function is to bring the individual into alignment with God's will. As observed in Chapter 5 (pp.155; 163-165), obedience to God and maintaining high moral standards are crucial to obtaining blessings and thus advancing in life, while immorality and sin prevent one from accessing the full extent of one's 'rightful' blessings from God and are therefore often blamed for failure to progress.

Compliance with the behavioural codes of a church can increase one's moral and social status, and non-compliance, particularly in the SDA and Pentecostal denominations, usually leads to exclusion from the church. Sometimes it is the church itself which actively excludes people who would like to attend, such as in the case of the unmarried mother referred to by the AG pastor above. More often, though, it is the individual who makes the decision as to whether or not to accept the rules laid down by the church, through prioritising their needs and concerns. They may feel a general aversion to having their behaviour dictated to them ("you see, men, most of the time find it difficult in terms of letting somebody advise them" (Kwodwo, MDCC)). Or they may be unwilling to conform to specific conventions such as the prohibition of jewellery, alcohol or pre-marital sex. Sometimes the stakes are high. A deaconess in the AG church describes the position of a hypothetical woman who has been called to account in the church:

Let's say she is keeping a boyfriend, or she is following somebody's husband and that's where she gets her food, clothing, everything, yeah, the man will provide everything for her. So she thinks, if I leave that man, if I forego all these things, how am I going to live? So the best thing is to leave the church and do her own thing. (Anna, AG)

The fear of poverty, then, may override the potential benefits of moral status and church membership. For those already feeling the pressures of poverty, it is possible

for church to become less of an option precisely because they are poor, as attending church requires giving money and wearing smart clothes—indeed, a common criticism of churches is that they are seen primarily as a kind of fashion show: “some of them just come to church for dressing, some of them their aim, coming to church with my new attire or something” (female pastor, MDCC). A former Methodist member recounts why he did not attend church after completing school and returning to his parents’ home:

Because though I liked going to church, I still lacked some facilities like having a simple, you know, dresses for church, even shoes, I never had it. So even those things, those material things prevented me from going to church. Because at that time my mum and my dad were not providing me, they could not provide me. Whereas if I had somebody who could have bought me all these things I would have gone to church, because on Sunday if I should tell my dad I’m going to church and I have those things nice on me then he wouldn’t prevent me. But ... I realised my friends who were going to church were putting on nice [clothes] and shoes. And I had none, or even if I had it was maybe one, only one, and I can’t go to church all the time with the same dress. (Kwaku, AG)

### ***Dependence of the social on the spiritual***

On the other hand, human relationships also depend to a certain extent on relationships with spirits. Relationships are crucial in decisions regarding church selection: in virtually all cases of somebody attending a new church they were recommended or introduced to it by another person, usually a friend or family member but occasionally also someone with some influence over them such as a school teacher, landlady or older family friend. In Ndwumizili many people attended the Methodist church as children since the village had a Methodist primary school; others were taken to the church frequented by their parents. However, it is not only in facilitating access to church that relationships are significant; the relational aspect of the church group is also commonly cited in interviews as a motivation for attending. Churches provide a community, ‘a family’, or ‘fellowship’ as some people expressed it, a place to get to know other people, to discuss issues, to find encouragement, support and solutions to difficulties. Of course, relationships do not always work positively, and also feature among reasons given for leaving churches, whether relating to a particular conflict, as in the case of an AG member who left her previous church because of hostility from a friend of her co-wife (polygamy is not uncommon



in Ghana) who also attended the church, or to more general experiences of hostility or gossip.

In some ways the dependence of human relationships on spirits is explicitly recognised and often requested, for example by those who pray for the provision of a marriage partner or a sponsor for their studies. Other prayers requesting specific intervention in relationships include those for the resolution of domestic conflict and that a father resident in Nigeria should return to Ghana. *Nyame* is not the only spiritual power perceived to be able to influence relationships: *abosom* (secondary deities) are also approached and rumours abound of the use of juju to attract and retain lovers or to prevent or destroy undesired relationships. Such power is taken very seriously: an article entitled 'The 'juju' side of love' on the 'relationships' page of *The Mirror*, a weekly national newspaper, begins:

There are many stories of people who have sought love through juju, an occultic power. Mallams, fetish priests and fake pastors are cashing in on the ignorance of many who, instead of finding true love through hard work, commitment and honesty, seek easier options through invisible forces.

A concoction, a talisman, blood, a handkerchief gift, powder and a mere handshake, smile or spoken words are common media allegedly used to command supernatural forces to manifest physically and control the actions of lovers.

Juju in love aims at seeking happiness and success in all things related to love by:

- Attracting and winning the love of the opposite sex.
- Winning back lost love.
- Assisting in enjoying love life and preventing a lover from leaving.
- Changing an unhappy married life to a happy loving life.
- Harming or completely eliminating others seen as a hindrance.
- Preventing others from loving or being loved.

(Boakye 2006)

Interplay between spirits and humans therefore works in both directions. Not only can spirits intervene in human relationships, but they can be requested or manipulated to do so by humans.

Relationships with spirits also affect relationships between humans in ways less direct than deliberate administration of charms and concoctions. As noted in Chapter 5 (p.136-137), indicators of strength of relationship with spirits (the measure of one's 'spiritual wealth') appear tangibly in Ghanaian society in the form of success. Attributes such as old age, qualifications, titles, seniority in employment, good health and prosperity are often read as signs that a person has close relationships with spiritual forces. These may be good, where success is interpreted as a blessing from God, or evil, where it is seen as a result of juju or witchcraft; either way success implies spiritual power and therefore demands respect. These things are therefore sought after not only for what they bring in themselves, such as health and material goods, but also for their capacity to enhance one's power and status in society.

Wealth is ambivalent not only because it can signify either blessing from God or dealings with evil spirits, but also because as well as bringing social status and power it can be damaging, leaving one open to threats from others. Apart from inviting suspicion of acquiring wealth by immoral means, through evil spiritual power, we have seen in Chapter 5 (pp.144-145) that it can also render a person vulnerable to those who may be jealous and wish their downfall, as well as those who see them as possible sources of financial or material assistance. The concept of enemyship was discussed in Chapter 5 (pp.145-146): the idea that one has enemies desiring one's downfall is assumed as an inevitable part of life. These people can attack through malicious activities such as gossip, betrayal and poisoning as well as witchcraft (if they possess such powers) or juju via an expert. Although they often remain unidentified, family members are prime suspects. In addition, there is an awareness of the danger of impersonal harm committed by people such as armed robbers and fraudsters, whose aim is not to cause pain to particular people, but simply to enrich themselves through immoral means. The certainty that enemies exist who can attack through incorporeal as well as tangible channels, combined with the uncertainty of who these enemies might be, leads to an underlying sense of distrust within a community. This is directed at both the unknown and the known: strangers and close family members alike are viewed with wariness.

## ***Suspicion and secrecy***

*The crab is shaking hands with you, but he is shaking hands with you in order to bite you.* (Akan proverb, Appiah *et al.* 2007: 165)

*A person fears the person who is near him.* (Akan proverb, Appiah *et al.* 2007: 203)

The ambivalent nature of relationships leads to patterns of interaction marked by, firstly, suspicion and vigilance. We will see below how the value of hospitality on which Ghanaians pride themselves is not realised without a measure of distrust. Visitors, whether known or strangers (and indeed more permanent members of the household) are viewed as potential enemies. People live with an abiding sense of suspicion which manifests itself constantly in all areas of life, from Helen, a grandmother, keeping her bathroom locked to prevent her children and grandchildren from stealing her soap to churches desiring their own buildings for reasons of security, as the leader of the Seventh Day Adventists pointed out:

Now we [have our building] we've become secured, unlike being in a classroom, when you have gone out anyone at all can be there, they can do whatever they like there. And our God is a holy God, wherever we worship him must be holy. And we must not overlook the fact that there are forces all over in this world. There is that great controversy still existing, bad and good fighting against each other, God and Satan. So, when you don't have a church building and then you just engage in worshipping at any other place like the classroom, whilst you have gone away it's exposed to everybody, it appears to be no-man's land.

Thus, during a funeral, when their house is full of visitors, two women sitting on the terrace begin to discuss something between themselves in low, urgent tones, before one rises quickly to go to the kitchen. The other explains on questioning that she has food for her baby cooking on the stove and they are afraid that somebody might interfere with it. To somebody from Western society, where the dominant model of relationship is, in Adams' terms, 'independent selfways', based on the assumption that individuals are basically separate, unconnected entities (Adams 2005: see Chapter 2 p.55), such fears appear paranoid and without adequate rational basis. In Ghanaian society, however, where an inherent connection between people is assumed ('interdependent selfways'), along with a sense that behind every event or situation is some kind of intention (see Chapter 5 pp.145-146), caution such as this is logical and well-advised.

Secondly, ambivalence in relationships results in secretiveness: an unwillingness to disclose acquisitions of money or opportunities in case others become jealous, or to reveal dreams or plans for fear that enemies will attempt to intervene and destroy them. Secrecy, by definition, is not immediately obvious; however, as my relationships with people deepened I sometimes found myself implicated in ‘secrets’. For instance, a friend telling me of hopes of employment by expatriates considering a business opportunity in the village, and another friend asking for help with a UK visa application both emphasised that I should not tell anyone of their plans, for fear of jealousy on the part of others.

The practice of secrecy is attributed moral legitimacy through church teachings. In Chapter 5 (pp.164-165) an AG sermon was referred to in which the speaker used several biblical and contemporary examples to illustrate the importance of guarding one’s tongue:

When we have a dream, anything good, it is better for us to keep it and control our tongue and mouth so that the enemy doesn’t get access to it and destroy our future plans and arrangements. (Natasha, AG service, 30/04/06)

The MDCC pastor gave a similar warning in the Easter ‘wake’ service:

Sometimes even when we dream, we tell our brothers and sisters or our family members or friends. Just like Joseph had so many visions and dreams, because he never kept them secret but told his brothers, his brothers rather turned to be his enemies and they tried to kill him and finish him off. So you see, sometimes when we dream or when God will do something for us, we need to keep it secret, we need to keep it confidential so that there will be no interruption from any evil or devil among even our own families. ... So sometimes it happens in our lives, you don’t have to reveal everything. (Pastor, MDCC service, 13/04/06)

Even within the church, members are not encouraged to disclose everything: “We [should not] turn to human beings, not even our sisters and brothers. Let’s pray to God, that is the appropriate way to do it” (Natasha, AG service, 30/04/06).

## Conclusion

Understanding the world as a continuous landscape occupied by a range of powers—both spirits and humans—rather than seeing those powers as constructs belonging uniquely to separate socio-religious discourses, provides a different perspective on the ways people act and relate in Ghanaian society. It also challenges some of the categories normally assumed by Western social science. There is clear continuity both between the spiritual and the physical or material, and between the spiritual and the social. In neither dimension is the spiritual divided off into a separate domain or world; rather, spirits form part of wider Ghanaian society and are continually considered and interacted with. Continuity between the spiritual and the physical, manifested in areas such as response to illness, opens up questions of what can appropriately be labelled ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’. What Western social science designates as ‘non-religious’, such as biomedicine, money and human relationships, fits without contradiction or conflict into a cosmology that includes an omnipotent God, deities of varying power and influence, ancestors, herbalists, juju experts and witches. Conversely, much of what social science labels ‘religious’, such as juju and interaction with deities and ancestors, is rather considered pragmatic (although not always morally correct) action in relation to powers of which the existence is undoubted. In fact, dealings with spirits are always practical: there is no sense of desiring spiritual development simply for its own sake. People interact with powers, positioning themselves in relation to these to the best of their ability in order to maximise blessings and protect from harm in their day-to-day lives; they do not operate within discrete religious frameworks of belief. Relations with such powers are interdependent with relations between humans: they do not belong to separate realms and are not straightforward or constant in character; rather, they are interdependent and ambivalent, relatedness being both a resource and a threat. The nature of both is determined by as well as determines the way people negotiate certain areas of life, such as wealth and morality. People determine their moral behaviour and their management of wealth according to codes set by and relationships with both spirits and humans. On the other hand, these relationships are also greatly influenced by the way people act in such areas. People thus live in a context of continual ambivalence as they negotiate their relatedness with both humans and spirits, aware that both can bring them harm as well as good.

## **Conclusion: The Challenge of the Everyday**

### **Introduction**

The fundamental challenge in studying religion—and particularly religion in a non-Western society—from a social science perspective is largely one of translation. All qualitative research involves the task of interpreting the experiences and perspectives of a certain person or group of people and articulating this in a way understandable to others. This becomes even more challenging when it is a matter of attempting to encapsulate in terms recognised by post-Enlightenment, Western development studies a phenomenon in a non-Western culture that reaches beyond society to the spiritual, which is not bound by ‘rational’ social norms. Achieving closer understanding of the perspective of the people in the research therefore entails questioning social science categories and oppositions that are often assumed within development discourse but which may not always be appropriate for the context in question. This concluding chapter serves to summarise and draw together the discussions and arguments in the previous chapters, and considers the implications of these arguments firstly for social science thinking, secondly for the study of Christianity in Africa and thirdly for development studies and practice.

### **Categories and Continuities**

In the first chapter of this thesis we saw that development has tended to bring with it in its approach to religion certain assumptions that reflect its roots in a modernist agenda based on post-Enlightenment principles. The secular and the religious are separated and opposed along the same lines as physical and spiritual, rational and irrational, modern and traditional, public and private. It is only with the recent advent of postmodernism and the opening up of development as a more contested and pluralised arena that mainstream, secular development practitioners and theoreticians

have begun to view religion as playing a meaningful role both in development itself and in the lives of people targeted by development activities. Over the past decade there has been growing interest in engaging with religion, mainly as a means to achieving established development goals, but also as it is increasingly recognised that religion is central to the lives and values of most people in developing countries, thereby playing a potential role in shaping development programmes. This engagement has, however, largely been sought on an organisational level, with development agencies urged to interact with specific 'faith communities' and 'faith-based organisations'. Diversity within and fluidity between such groupings is often not taken into account.

The tendency to work in terms of discretely bounded religious groups is not unique to development. Deciding where to lay lines of division and categorisation has been a major issue in the study of Christianity in Ghana and in Africa more generally (Chapter 2 pp.32-34). There is an enormous variety of churches and religious movements which have proliferated over recent years, inviting attempts to categorise and fit them into typologies. To the broadly recognised mission/historic churches, indigenous/spiritual churches and (classical) Pentecostal churches have been added the neo-Pentecostal or charismatic churches which have burst onto the scene over the past 25 years. The majority of work on Christianity in Ghana has been based on these four areas and, although nominally acknowledging diversity and blurred boundaries, for the most part authors have not taken this into serious consideration and have thus continued to uphold these divisions.

It is not only between church denominations that artificial oppositions have been imposed (Chapter 2 pp.34-39). The study of Christianity in Africa has been underpinned by the Eurocentric view of Christianity as a Western religion introduced by missionaries into a foreign (African) culture. Studies of African indigenous churches in particular have therefore centred on the Africanisation of Christianity and the Christianisation of African culture, contributing to the reification of Africa and Christianity as oppositional categories which need to be reconciled. Pentecostal-charismatic churches, on the other hand, are approached in the context of discussions regarding the relationship between two other categories, modernity and tradition, whether seen as trapping people in a worldview based on supernatural rather than

technical-rational principles (Gifford 2004a), or as space providing the potential to break with the past and engage with the modern (Meyer 1998a) (pp.39-43).

We are therefore faced with a series of binary oppositions, such as secular/religious, physical/spiritual, modern/traditional, Christianity/culture and Western/African. On top of these are sets of categories, primarily different church sectoral and denominational groupings and different religions. When considering religion, the basic view of the world from a social science perspective is often in terms of separate socio-religious discourses: Islam, Christianity, traditional religion and secularism to name but a few. Even when these are not viewed as static and it is recognised that the way they are conceptualised, practised, articulated and constructed varies according to spatial, temporal, environmental and social conditions, it is still the discourse or religion that frames analysis. In everyday life, however, people do not always think in terms of discourses. Daily life tends to be focussed around daily, existential concerns, as has been repeatedly shown in the case of Ghana (Gifford 2004a; Hawkins 1997; Larbi 2001b; Sackey 2001): money, health, education, status, marriage and children are pressing issues. Rather than opposition, there is continuity between the spiritual and the physical or material, and between the religious and the secular. Moreover, people do not necessarily refer to a fully worked-out, coherent and identifiable belief system or cosmology in making decisions regarding their actions. Literature from medical anthropology demonstrates that in seeking effective healthcare people tend to act pragmatically, drawing on and combining elements from different socio-medical 'systems' as they exercise various options without necessarily accepting their ideological bases. Modernity is thus negotiated in Ghana through a range of discourses, including spiritual ones such as witchcraft and Pentecostalism (Chapter 2 pp.47-56).

## **Towards an Alternative Framework**

### ***The Powers***

Rather than conceptualising the world in terms of separate religious discourses, each with its own cosmology and spiritual actors, this thesis has shown that residents of Ndwumizili view the universe as a continuous landscape populated by a range of different powers, both spirits and human (Chapter 5 pp.132-147). These include a



supreme, creator God, secondary deities or ‘small gods’, ancestors, evil spirits, the devil, witches and juju practitioners. They also include doctors, herbalists and institutions of authority such as the chieftaincy, the state, the family and the church. Few (if any) people in Ndwumizili, whatever their ‘religion’, would deny the existence of any of these powers, or that each of these powers has the capacity to intervene in or influence one’s life, most of them being able to bring both blessings and harm. Although they are not all equally powerful or united in purpose (indeed, they may be as opposed to each other as good and evil), they do not ‘belong’ exclusively to separate religions and belief in their existence does not depend on acceptance of a particular religious tradition. There is little question but that they all exist: the question is how and to what extent to interact with them. Each person must therefore negotiate this world of powers, placing him or herself in the best possible position in relation to each of them in order to gain maximum benefit, protecting themselves from harm and procuring blessings.

The way these powers are viewed is not fixed or uniform. There have been shifts over time as new powers have entered the arena, such as biomedical doctors, the nation-state and Jesus, and as others have gained prominence, such as the perceived presence of witches. Related to these and wider structural socio-economic changes, the perception of established powers has altered, particularly the ‘small gods’ and to a lesser extent the ancestors, both of whom appear to have moved from a neutral position, concerned with both their own interests and the upkeep of morality and social cohesion, to being viewed by many as inherently evil. This reconceptualisation has been brought about largely by the growth of Christianity, particularly Pentecostalism which, rather than denying the existence of such powers, designates them as evil, aligned with the devil and opposed to God. However, as change is always ongoing, such reframing is never complete. In people’s perceptions of and dealings with powers (not only ‘small gods’ and ancestors) there is a sense of uncertainty. This is not only because many of the powers are largely invisible and incorporeal. Their nature is contested and usually ambivalent: they are seen differently from different perspectives and through time, and they may bring both harm and good. They also tend to be personified and personalised: negotiating the powers entails engaging in relationships with beings that have their own interests and agenda—and relationships are never entirely predictable. The powers exist as potential influences and options and people are likely to act pragmatically in

exercising these options even if they are not sure of the powers with whom they are interacting, but the outcome is never certain.

Churches both reflect and influence people's worldviews (Chapter 5 pp.147-167). The two at the centre of this study differ enormously in their history, organisation and practices, to the extent that one does not consider the other properly Christian. The MDCC is an indigenous Ghanaian church. Although it now has branches in other countries, including the UK and the USA, it remains essentially insular since it not only closely mirrors the social structures of the culture in which it was founded, but also imposes several markers of membership, including wearing particular jewellery, paying a monthly fee and learning a special language. At the level of practice the MDCC revolves around fixed liturgy, learnt by heart, and corporate rituals including much singing, dancing and drumming as well as the symbolic use of items such as water, candles, incense, oil and crosses. The church leadership is strictly hierarchical, knowledge is esoteric and pastors and prophets revered. This is in contrast to the AG, which was originally an American mission church and has a more democratic structure based on notions of equality—though pastors are still highly respected and deferred to as 'men of God'. This church is based on Bible study and opposes ritual and the symbolic use of items such as those mentioned above. Rather than rooting itself in local culture, it seeks to transcend culture and sees itself as part of a global community of not only AG but all Pentecostal churches.

Despite their differences, the two churches are remarkably similar in their teachings and in the worldview of their members. Leaders and members of both continually speak in terms of blessings and protection from harm. Blessings come from God and harm from the devil, and the absence of one is often interpreted as the presence of the other. Both can be manifested through other spirits or people—sometimes the same person—thus, as relationships are ambivalent and evil is ubiquitous, it is seen as advisable to maintain a level of distrust in even close relationships. Blessings and protection can be attained through obedience to God and living holy lives (including giving to God through the church), through constant prayer and, in the MDCC (and particularly for protection), through participation in church rituals. The churches are also similar in their strong sense of group identity. Outward expression of membership of the denomination is important, and membership provides access to social and material resources that are not available to those outside the group, such as

financial assistance, opportunities for employment and upward mobility and accommodation when travelling (Chapters 6 (pp.192-196) and 7 (pp.209-219)). Church can also depreciate one's resources, particularly through constant and heavy demands for money. Wealth implies power, whether good or evil, and pastors who prosper are both strongly criticised for exploiting impoverished congregations, and respected as having access to spiritual power. In the MDC and AG churches of Ndwumizili, where the pastors themselves are poor, there is still tension around the question of money. Multiple offerings contribute to members' financial problems and act as a deterrent from attending church, yet the offerings themselves are presented as a solution to problems as it is through giving that one receives blessings (Chapters 5 (p.155,163) and 7 (pp.206-208)).

However, as the church is not the only abode of power, in addressing their problems, in seeking protection and blessings, people may also turn elsewhere. They draw not only on 'secular' powers such as biomedicine (Chapter 7 pp.198-205), and on support from institutions such as the family (Chapter 6 pp.192-196), but they may also seek help from other spiritual powers, through juju practitioners, *mallams* (Islamic holy men), herbalists and fetish priests (Chapter 6 pp.177-181). Church itself is by no means considered a unitary body, and many people frequently switch between different churches and different denominations of church in order to access the greatest and most effective powers, whether this takes the form of a pastor with a reputation for powerful prayer and achieving miracles, or a particular church which specialises in, for example, healing (Chapter 6 pp.181-185). Whether seeking help from powers within or outside the church spectrum, the employment of multiple strategies does not necessarily take place in a linear fashion: people do not simply move through a number of different social or religious discourses discarding each until they find one that works. They may do this with respect to the powers themselves, for example trying a range of churches in search of one with effective solutions or neglecting deities that do not deliver results; however, these powers do not necessarily represent whole religions or philosophies. Rather, because the world is conceptualised in terms of powers instead of belief or thought systems, it is quite possible—and common—for people to combine different 'discourses', drawing on them simultaneously in a pragmatic fashion, without any sense of contradiction.

This is not to say that people are not constrained in the actions they take to address their problems. Morality plays a major role in defining what people can, should or are willing to do, and also in determining how people relate to each other as well as to spirits and other powers. While churches have some influence over people's sense of morality, so too do other institutions and forces, such as the family, traditional social structures and foreign (often Western) cultures. These themselves are not separate discourses: members of the churches in this study are influenced by and espouse values associated with all of them (Chapter 6 pp.172-177). Moral frameworks are constructed in relation to both spirits and humans: people's behaviour and actions have significance to both. Indeed, relationships with spirits are largely dependent on other people, in particular religious experts but also on moral behaviour towards other people. Conversely, relationships with humans depend to a large extent on relationships with spirits, both in their power to intervene and in the heightened social status brought by perceived spiritual wealth. Relatedness is therefore ambivalent, not only in the sense that it is both a resource (bringing potential blessings) and a threat (bringing potential harm), but also in that it entails continued negotiation with both humans and spirits in the tension between morality and power (Chapter 7 pp.208-219).

Studying religion on a micro-level thus entails interrogating divisions and oppositions often implicitly assumed within social science and by development academics and agencies. Continuities between categories such as physical and spiritual, modern and traditional, and Christianity and culture call into question a further opposition: between the 'religious' and the 'non-religious'. In a context where the world is viewed as a continuous landscape of different powers, these terms become difficult to apply. Is everything religious, in that it has some spiritual meaning? Or is nothing religious because spirits are simply part of the social landscape? Ultimately such questions may never lead to appropriate answers. Dangers exist both from collapsing the religious entirely into the sociological and from collapsing the sociological entirely into the religious. We talk about 'religion' because in order to engage with what is happening we have to use terms that have some meaning to us and with which we can refer to other, related phenomena. What is important is to recognise that these terms may not have the same meanings for other people and, in questioning the language we use, to try to gain an understanding of others' perspectives.

## ***Negotiation***

The story that has unfolded over the course of this thesis has been one of people in an unpredictable world seeking to marshal to their own advantage powers of which they are not quite certain, in order to acquire blessings and to protect themselves from harm. Negotiation is clearly an underlying theme of this story; however, the way this term is understood requires some discussion. The powers that people seek to marshal are generally imagined as personal and are often not immediately visible or tangible. They are by definition potent and have their own agenda and volition; moreover, for the most part they are not dependent on human beings, except sometimes as a medium through which to express themselves. The kind of negotiation involved in marshalling these powers is therefore not negotiation between equals; it does not entail entering into a dialogue in which both parties have vested interests and are equally dependent on each other for achieving their purposes. Rather, marshalling the powers entails negotiation in the sense of managing an uncertain or difficult environment. It is less a question of negotiating *with* the powers than negotiating the powers, in the sense of a rally driver negotiating uncertain terrain.

People therefore possess a certain amount of agency: by drawing on spiritual discourses they are able to manage the reality of their circumstances and relationships with reference to a range of powers, both human and spirit. However, while they are not completely helpless, nor do people engage with the powers on an entirely free basis, a situation which reflects sociological thinking on structure and agency (Giddens 1984; Wood 2007) although here the constraints are perceived as personal powers rather than impersonal social forces. Marshalling powers involves submitting to their requirements, whether this means making sacrifices, praying and fasting, giving money, or dressing in a certain manner. Different powers are not necessarily in harmony with each other and some are clearly conflicting, thus people face practical and moral dilemmas as they seek to harness their power. They are sometimes caught between conflicting moral frameworks and risk incurring the wrath of one power as they attempt to marshal another.

Although the powers are not always tangible, they are very much a part of everyday life. Firstly, it is through human intermediaries that power is often accessed. Certain members of society are considered to possess high levels of spiritual wealth and are therefore seen as being particularly close to certain spirits, for example pastors of

churches, priests and priestesses of *abosom*, and chiefs. Such people therefore act as mediums of power: by operating as intermediaries between humans and spirits they are implicated in other people's marshalling of powers. In effect, they are seen as powers in themselves, although their power does not originate with them. The powers therefore make themselves present in the relationships and structures of daily life: they are negotiated through these structures or, in other words, as people negotiate power relationships and social structures they are negotiating the powers.

Secondly, powers are negotiated through everyday relationships within the community. As already noted, the powers tend to be personalised and personified as volitional actors with their own interests. Intent is assumed to lie behind both positive and negative (but particularly negative) conditions and events (and non-events in the case, for example, of continuing good health or the failure to pass exams). This intent, however, is not always attributed to a spirit, whether or not the power is perceived to originate with spirits. Since everyone has the potential to marshal powers, the reason behind a harmful event might lie with another person who has deliberately harnessed power for malicious purposes. The consequence of such a possibility is often suspicion of the use of juju or of witchcraft, which may or may not result in accusations and retribution. Whether or not open conflict is the outcome, everyday actions and relationships are very much shaped and affected by this aspect of people's cosmologies and the secrecy and distrust that it engenders. Thus the powers, even if they are not always tangible, are very much bound up in everyday life. People negotiate the powers as they negotiate their relationships with other people and as they make decisions about their actions.

## Implications

On 20<sup>th</sup> January 2008 the Africa Cup of Nations football championship kicked off in Accra. A photo report of the opening match, Ghana versus Guinea, includes a picture of a heavysset man standing before the crowd in the stadium (Picture 8.1 below).<sup>48</sup> In the background the stands are packed with fans and European camera crews mill around preparing for kick-off. The man is wearing green cloth, passed over one

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<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/photo.detail.php?ID=137916&VOLGNR=10>, accessed 22/01/08.

shoulder in allusion to traditional Ghanaian style, and his raised arms display bands of red, gold and green attaching feathers to his wrists and upper arms. His face is smeared black, feathers are stuffed into his mouth, layers of beads hang around his neck and in either hand he holds up a live guinea fowl. On his head he wears a tubular cloth hat, two feet tall, also coloured in bands of red, gold and green. In the centre of the hat is a black star, and above that the symbol of a cross. The caption to the picture reads: “Predicting the ‘two akonfem [guinea fowl] goals’ before the match”. The final score is Ghana 2, Guinea 1.

The cross is very clearly the form of the Christian cross. The birds, feathers, beads and face paint are associated with fetish priests, *mallams* and juju practitioners. The red, gold and green are the colours of the Ghanaian flag, which incorporates a black star. The identity of this man, however, remains unknown, along with his profession and religious affiliation. Perhaps he is a fetish priest or a *mallam* and has based his prediction on religious knowledge. Perhaps he is simply a showman, entertaining the crowd with what would turn out to be a lucky guess at the score. Whoever he is, in his clothes, adornments and gesture he does not represent one religion or philosophy—Christianity, ‘traditional religion’ or secular politics—rather, he demonstrates the continuity between these domains that are so often divided. In his allegiance to the modern Ghanaian state he simultaneously invokes spiritual powers associated with both Christianity and ‘traditional religion’.

This is not an isolated incident: such ‘contradictions’ are commonplace in Ghanaian society. They are usually found in everyday life, in decisions people make on a daily basis regarding how they address their problems and how they relate with others—both humans and spirits. This is the complexity that is missed when religion is studied purely from the outside and in terms of organisations and separate systems of belief and practice.

### ***Social science thinking***

Thinking about religion in terms of powers forces us to rethink some of the core categories deployed in the study of religion by social sciences. Some categories have been rejected completely (such as ‘belief’), some have been engaged with and their shortcomings explored (such as ‘physical’ and ‘spiritual’), and some have been

developed into a new analytical framework (such as 'powers'). This clearly has implications for wider social science thinking, challenging the categorical frameworks on which much analysis is based.

Oppositions such as religious/non-religious, physical/spiritual and Christianity/culture are rooted in post-Enlightenment principles which developed in Europe during and after the eighteenth century. They are part of an epistemological tradition founded on the premise of rationality: separating out the rational and the irrational and privileging the former over the latter. This is the basis on which a large proportion of work within the social sciences has been and continues to be carried out, regardless of context. It represents an 'etic' analysis which seeks to interpret diverse experiences (indeed, all human experience) through the application of standard, universal and externally-defined tools of analysis.

However, while rendering diverse experiences comparable and accessible within a single system of interpretation, an etic approach risks failing to represent adequately the perspectives of the subjects of this experience, or to allow for the possibility of alternative valid interpretations. This thesis has shown that the use as analytical instruments of externally-defined categories such as those mentioned above is not always appropriate. It thus points to the 'emic' perspective as essential to gaining an accurate understanding of the reality of any specific context. Rather than depending on frameworks and categories of analysis developed externally, it is suggested that in order to gain an accurate understanding of a particular situation it is necessary to identify and develop categories of analysis which arise from that context, recognising that these may not concur with the 'etic' perspective. Distinction between the physical or material and the spiritual, for example, is not a useful opposition with which to analyse religion in Ndwumizili because there is so much continuity between the categories. Likewise, although there are differences between churches, to make categorical divisions between different churches and religions the basis of an epistemological framework is less useful in understanding religion in this context than an analysis of the situation in terms of powers.

This, of course is not easy, especially since social science thinking is rooted in such dualisms and categories to the extent that they form part of the training of every social scientist, including those not of Western origin. Indeed, the very tools used to



deconstruct such thinking, such as the etic/emic dialectic, also form part of the same epistemological tradition. Detailed ethnographic analysis is therefore required in order to represent as accurately as possible the perspectives of the research subjects.

However, this is not to suggest that all existing instruments of analysis be immediately abandoned. This would be akin to forbidding a builder not only his tools but also his knowledge, and instructing him to create a new set of each from nothing at the same time as he builds a house different from any he has ever seen before. The old tools and frameworks in research can be useful in the process of developing new ways of understanding the world, even in their capacity as points of departure. Thus, it has been helpful to consider the categorical distinctions between church denominations and religious traditions as part of the process of demonstrating that such divisions do not form the best framework for understanding how religion is played out in people's lives. This is all the more the case as, while analysis must represent the object of study as accurately as possible, it must also ultimately abstract from empirical observations and engage with social science on a theoretical level. Thus we are brought back to the issue of translation and negotiation. The process of developing emic understandings of reality is one of negotiation, both between the research subjects and the researcher in the field, and between the perspectives of the people being studied and the language of social science, with the researcher as broker or translator. Ultimately however, if understandings of reality are always negotiated, a truly emic perspective may be impossible to reach.

It should also be noted that the thrust of this discussion is not simply to challenge an imposition of Western concepts onto non-Western contexts. Although the positivist tradition which underlies the etic perspective developed within Europe, its categorical frameworks are not necessarily appropriate even within Western contexts. Firstly, society changes over time and has transformed considerably since the Enlightenment period. Secondly, Western societies contain enormous diversity, not least due to continual migration from other countries and cultures. Thirdly, the principle of rationality on which such thinking is based represents the dominant school of thought at the time: it is a product of the socio-economic conditions but does not necessarily provide a 'correct' analysis even of the society in which it was developed. Finally, in any culture the analytical and abstracting perspectives of social science are necessarily different from the 'everyday' understandings that people use

in the conduct of their day-to-day lives. The implications of this thesis are therefore relevant on a much wider scale than the immediate context of the study.

### ***The study of Christianity in Africa***

A more specific area in which the findings of this study have implications is the study of Christianity in Africa. It was noted in Chapter 2 that while scholars of Christianity in Ghana acknowledge diversity and continuity between categories of churches, most discussion continues to be organised around denominational divisions (p.34). Much of the existing literature selects one of the three main church sectors (AICs, mission churches and Pentecostal-charismatic churches) and examines it in relation to its social, economic or cultural environment. Discussion remains concentrated on the discourses emanating from the churches through their teachings and practices. However, differences between the teachings of particular leaders within the same denomination are evident, especially due to the availability of a wide range of additional Christian resources in the form of, for example, books, Bible study guides and television and radio broadcasts of church services and sermons, often from evangelical and charismatic sources. Moreover, as well as ‘horizontal’ variation, there is also likely to be ‘vertical’ difference, between hierarchical levels within church ranks and also between pastors and their congregations. A shift in focus from the churches to their members demonstrates that simply being a member of a church does not necessarily mean that a person adheres strictly to the teachings of that church, nor even interprets them in the same way as do the church leaders. It also reveals that the boundaries between specific churches, between denominations and between religious traditions are not fixed. People are likely to switch between and combine strategies from all of these, marshalling different powers, as they seek to protect themselves from harm and acquire blessings. The implication is that in order to gain a full picture of how religion is played out in the lives of Ghanaians (and potentially more widely in Africa), studies of Christianity in Ghana need to move beyond their church orientation and become more person-based. This means either taking into consideration within church or denominational studies the extra-church activities and influences of members (as this study has done), or taking as a starting point a population not defined by religious identity—perhaps a geographical area or a specific sector of society—and investigating the ways in which different

powers are marshalled within and by that group of people. Either way, there must be a focus on the everyday contexts in which religion is played out.

A person-based approach concentrates attention on the place of religion in Africa from the perspective of people's everyday practice. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the issue of external frameworks being imposed onto African contexts is not new: this was the focus of a debate from the 1960s onwards. Scholars were divided between those taking an historical or socio-structural perspective and others who advocated cultural or symbolic anthropology, leading to a synthesis of the two approaches by some in the 1980s. Although dualisms such as physical/spiritual and Christianity/culture are continually contested (pp.38-47), the tendency to analyse in terms of such categories remains. A debate is opening up around the category of religion, with some scholars considering it as a pervasive and underlying element of African reality, while others insist that it be kept in its place as category of analysis among others rather than privileged as the lens through which Africans view the world (pp.46-47). While discussing the significance of religion, however, this debate has not addressed the question of how 'religion' is constituted in everyday practice. In general either the categories of 'spiritual' and 'religious' are completely collapsed into one, or 'religion' is used to refer to philosophical and cosmological traditions such as Christianity and Islam and including indigenous traditions, or 'African traditional religion'. This study suggests that these categorical boundaries do not concur with the perspectives of the residents of Ndwumizili: for example, matters relating to *abosom* are not necessarily considered religious (see p. 94). The intention of this thesis has been to explore the lives of members of the two churches on which the study has been focussed; therefore the term 'religion' is used flexibly in order to provide as complete a story as possible (see pp.95-96). The findings invite further research into the ways in which 'religion' is bounded, placed, and engaged with in everyday life.

### ***Development studies and practice***

There is already an acknowledged tradition of actor-oriented scholarship within development studies, and it is increasingly recognised that the religious and the spiritual are central to many people's understandings of the world, and that this is important to development policy because it influences their values and actions

(pp.20-21). However, literature on religion and development tends, as we have seen, to approach religion at the level of organisations such as churches or entire religions, rather than exploring its significance in the lives of smaller groups or individuals. As already indicated, this thesis demonstrates that divisions into such organisational units are somewhat superficial, concealing a great deal of eclecticism and fluidity. Analysis at this level therefore risks missing or misrepresenting the complex ways in which religion contributes to shape worldviews on an individual level.

As noted above, the findings of this research also suggest the need to question and move beyond some of the dualistic assumptions that lie beneath much social science analysis of religion. In particular the opposition between the 'religious' and the 'secular' should be recognised and challenged. A development discourse which, based on Enlightenment principles, seeks to overcome the irrational with the rational, needs to be qualified with the awareness that many people in developing (and developed) countries do not share this objective. Rather than renouncing 'irrational' religious beliefs, values and actions and replacing them with 'rational', secular traditions as modernity progresses, people in Ndwumizili construct personalised cosmologies on a practical basis, drawing on the different discourses available to them. These include discourses which are often labelled as 'religious', such as juju, witchcraft, communication with ancestors and various types of Christianity, although the people concerned may not consider them as such. On the other hand, other 'secular' discourses which are similarly drawn on are also considered to have a spiritual element. The approach suggested by this study to enable us to move beyond the religious/secular opposition is, through careful ethnographic research, to expose the inadequacies of such conceptual frameworks and to develop others which represent more accurately the perspective of the people in question.

If development agencies want to be genuinely actor-oriented, seriously taking on board what people say and think, when they engage with religion they must do so in a way that is meaningful and relevant to the everyday reality of people's lives. As well as working to form partnerships with organised religious bodies and institutions they must be aware of the fluidity, eclecticism, diversity and multiplicity that is concealed by the institutional landscape. Development theoreticians and practitioners must take care in treating 'faith communities' as discrete blocks and recognise that for many people religion consists mainly in practice rather than in abstract theology.

Members of ‘faith communities’ may not only switch between different groups, but may interpret and draw on the discourses of such groups simultaneously with other discourses as they pragmatically manage their daily lives. It is therefore simplistic and probably misleading to assume that messages sent out by churches alone either shape or represent the values and actions of their congregations: each church—or church leader—is just one of the powers they have to negotiate. Furthermore, churches are not always or perfectly altruistic: although they may provide networks and resources, these resources are likely to be shared primarily among the members of each denomination (or among their leaders) rather than distributed externally and equally to all. Indeed, churches may be more concerned with making money (and converts) and increasing their own status and the prosperity of their leaders and members than with community development. The development industry must also recognise the strength of socio-cultural values and ties, and take care to understand the significance in both human and spiritual terms of actions, objects, conditions and relationships, which outsiders may consider good, bad or neutral, but which evoke meanings on multiple levels.

Finally, development actors must be aware of their own position in people’s worldviews. Development understood as social or economic change, or as poverty reduction, capacity building, empowerment or freedom (Sen 1999), can offer potential means of marshalling the powers. However, development is not a neutral force: it is often embodied in the form of agencies and workers, and it too is ambivalent, bringing both blessings and harm. Development interventions and actors are not free from being interpreted through religious discourses. Development itself, therefore, in the form of government agencies and NGOs, also represents powers that populate the cosmological landscape of the residents of Ndwumizili. As such, as well as endeavouring to impose its own agenda, it can be engaged with and marshalled as people seek to negotiate those powers in their everyday lives. Such detailed ethnographic research advocated above entails recognising that while development theoreticians and practitioners consider religion in an instrumental fashion, asking what role religion can play in development, this instrumentalism can work both ways. When seen within the framework posited within this thesis, development in its embodied forms can appear as a power or set of powers to be marshalled. Thus development can also be used instrumentally as people draw on religious discourses to negotiate the world, using development agencies and workers present in their

community to maximise their blessings and protect them from harm. In one sense, of course, this is exactly what development is for: to be used by poor people for their benefit. However, it may be used and interpreted in ways other than it intends: programmes may be drawn on practically without acceptance of their ideological bases; benefits may be construed as blessings from God or as originating with evil powers; workers and beneficiaries may be implicated in relationships entailing bias, obligation and suspicion.

The underlying theme of this thesis has been negotiation: people managing an uncertain world by actively marshalling personalised powers in ways which transcend and defy Enlightenment-based categories of analysis. They are constrained by the volition of others, both humans and spirits. Thus, while this study has emphasised the agency of social actors, it has not portrayed this as especially manifested in co-operative or collective action. Fear of malicious or self-interested intent on the part of others, constructed particularly in the language of witchcraft and juju, results in distrust, suspicion and secrecy, which clearly forms a barrier to such co-operation. Even the family, which is the strongest social bond, is not free from such tensions; indeed, it is precisely in this context where social ties and interdependence are deepest that distrust is felt most strongly and most widely. Church congregations can go some way in providing new forms of identity and belonging which engender trust and love rather than suspicion and jealousy; however, these are often ultimately subordinate to family ties and relations. Distrust is evident both in terms of the way congregations relate to the outside world and within church circles themselves. There also appears to be increasing scepticism of pastors, particularly where they are seen to prosper.

Therefore, from the perspective of development policy that seeks to be actor-oriented it is essential to understand the terms of this negotiation between actors (both social and spiritual), since they are integral both to the nature of relationships and to how people approach problems in their lives. While it is important to consider the views and desires of the target population, it is also necessary to recognise that these opinions are shaped and conditioned by participants' cosmologies, which may not concur with the assumptions of development policy-makers and practitioners and may implicate others in the community. Literature on participatory development has shown that participatory approaches

should not be adopted regardless of social, political and cultural context, for context determines the feasibility of collective action. ... High levels of mutual suspicion, distrust and, consequently, low levels of social capital, militate against co-operation and undermine the chances of participatory approaches succeeding. (Golooba-Mutebi 2005: 955)

Golooba-Mutebi bases his argument in an analysis of witchcraft and social cohesion in a South African village. As we have already seen, social relations within a particular context are largely influenced by cosmological understandings of the world, which are unlikely to represent one discrete ‘religion’ or ideology. Development actors who wish to engage with religion should be aware that religion does not necessarily signify coherence and harmony, that religious institutions such as churches do not have complete influence over the values of their members, and that these values are not guaranteed to concur with those of development agencies. To comprehend the dynamics of social relations and ultimately to put in place well-informed and effective development strategies, it is necessary to understand the construction and significance of such cosmologies which, as well as solidarity, co-operation, trust, hope and love, entail negotiation, suspicion, ambivalence and uncertainty.

**Picture 8.1: “Predicting the ‘two akonfem goals’ before the match”.**



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